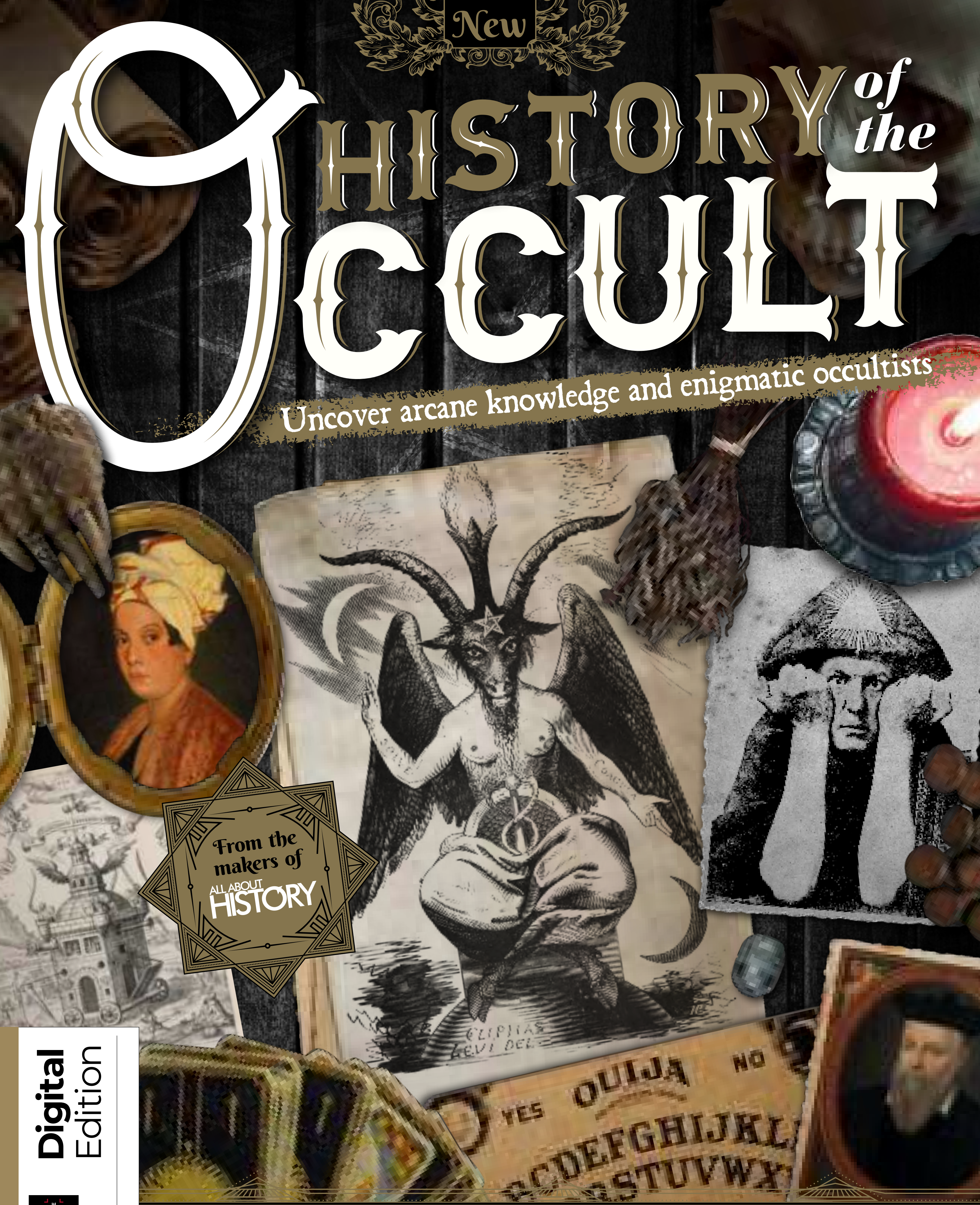
New

HISTORY of the OCCULT

Uncover arcane knowledge and enigmatic occultists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From the makers of ALL ABOUT HISTORY

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FUTURE
FOURTH EDITION

Alchemy ✠ Voodoo ✠ Séances ✠ Esoteric cults ✠ Astrology ✠ Mesmerism

Ecce faciem et figuram eius per quem omnia facta

Welcome to

HISTORY of the OCCULT

Knowledge of the occult is knowledge of the unmeasurable; the paranormal, the spiritual, and the arcane. Its origins are shrouded in mystery. History of the Occult delves deep into the past to investigate the hidden history of all things cryptic, mystic and other-worldly. Read about the lives of famous and controversial occultists, from Elizabeth I's court magician and astrologer John Dee, to possible prophet Nostradamus, and Aleister Crowley, denounced in the popular press as "the wickedest man in the world". Uncover spellbinding secrets about how astrology was used to find the best date for a coronation, how alchemists believed they could turn lead into gold, why séances became so popular, or how tarot cards could divine a person's future. Explore the mythic origins of the occult's most influential practitioner, Hermes Trismegistus, and how his spells and teachings have spread worldwide. Discover the runes, rituals and star signs behind the rise and fall of Hitler's Third Reich and how the "Mad Monk" Rasputin's dark powers influenced Russian royalty. Packed with incredible illustrations and insights, this is the perfect guide for believers and sceptics alike.

FUTURE

HISTORY of the OCCULT

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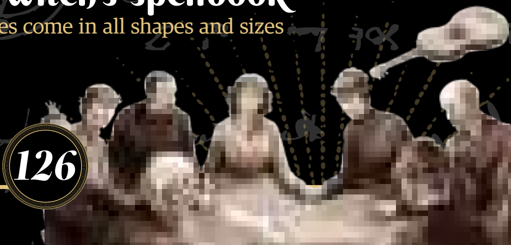

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Thoth, magic, and Hermes Trismegistus

A mythical figure. An ancient prophet. The figure of Hermes Trismegistus is shrouded in mystery, but where did the founder of Hermeticism really come from?

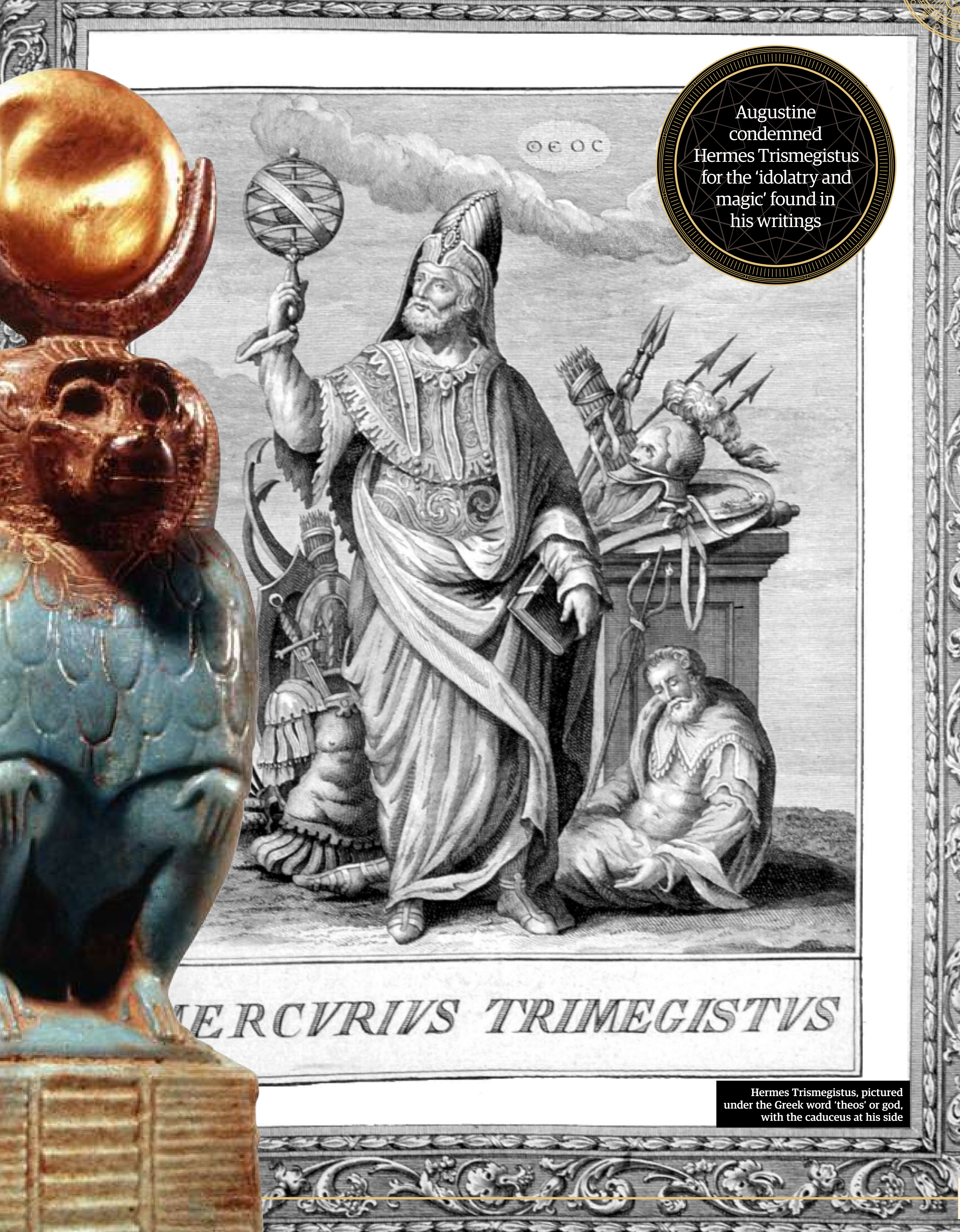
The Egyptian god Thoth depicted as a baboon, now located in the Louvre (Paris)

Written by Dee Dee Chainey

Hermes Trismegistus is a mystical figure, revered by many as an ancient prophet, who shared his knowledge of alchemy and the occult sciences through his writings in the ancient world. To uncover the truth of this figure, we must look back, to the furthest reaches of ancient Egyptian myth, to draw together the seeds of the legends that became a man.

Ritual and religion pervaded every part of life in ancient Egypt. A plethora of exotic and unusual gods and goddesses made up their diverse pantheon, worshipped as masters of the natural world. While gods were many, worship in this ancient religion focused on the king as an intermediary between the people and the divine, yet ancient texts hidden for centuries in tombs and secreted underground have now been unearthed. These texts show how people beseeched the gods and gave offerings up to them, to ask for their blessing and help in all things. These gods ruled over natural phenomena, the astral bodies, and aspects of daily life. Each deity was seen as an unknowable force, so depicted symbolically in ancient art, with different animals, objects and signs to represent these characteristics, and convey the true nature of the god. During the Middle Kingdom golden age, Osiris the god of the dead was one of the most important deities of the pantheon. Others included Isis, who offered help to the dead, and ruled magical healing and protection. She is linked with baking, weaving and brewing. Associated with the sky, Horus was a falcon-headed god, with the Moon as his left eye, and the Sun as his right. Linked with Horus, and too having the falcon as a symbol is Ra, a creator god, who would travel across the sky each day in his barge, carrying the Sun; at night he would travel to the underworld, hence explaining darkness to everyone who knew this myth.

From the Old Kingdom (c. 3700 to 2150 BCE) onwards, Thoth was a god of wisdom, writing and hieroglyphs, as well as knowledge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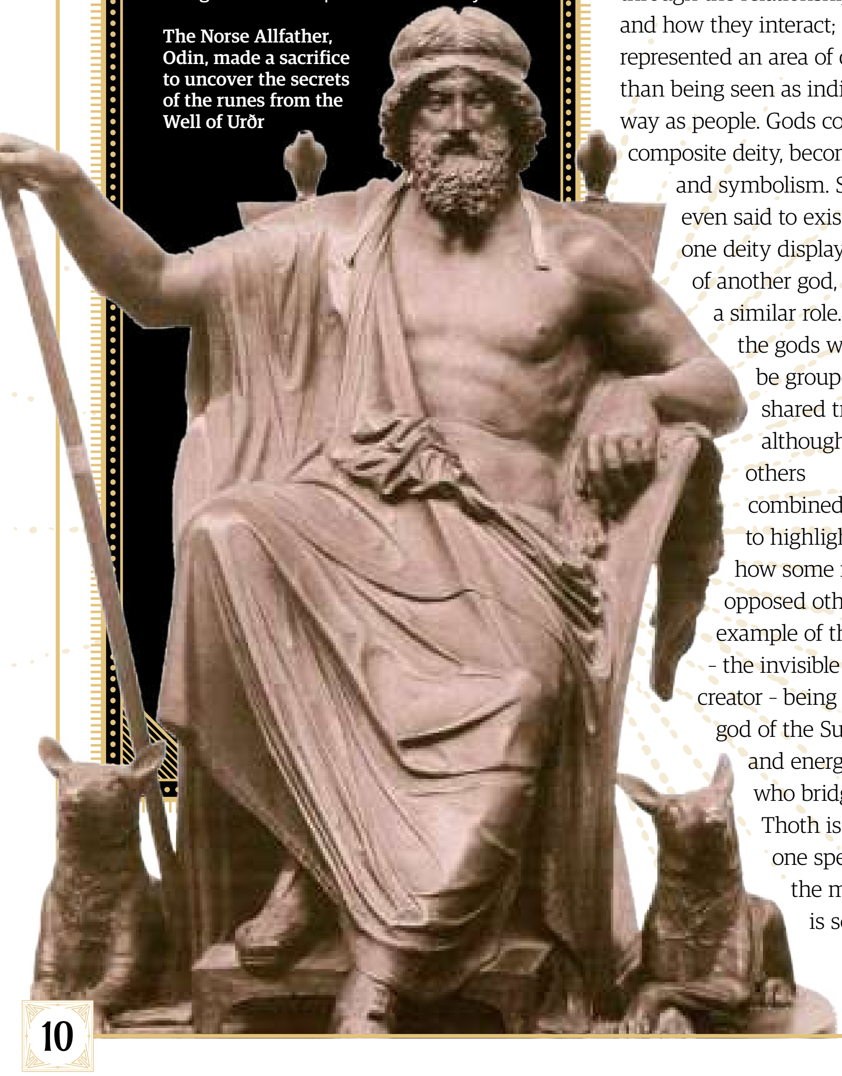
ERCVRIVS TRIMEGISTVS

Augustine condemned Hermes Trismegistus for the 'idolatry and magic' found in his writings

Hermes Trismegistus, pictured under the Greek word 'theos' or god, with the caduceus at his side

Gods of writing and magic

Gods of words and writing are often also gods of magic. Up until the Greek culture pervaded Egyptian life, writing and literacy were considered secret knowledge kept only for priests and scribes. Thoth was often considered to have created writing and languages as the scribe of the gods, a responsibility shared with the goddess Seshat; seen as the 'lord of books', he was a powerful word-smith. Many gods linked to the art of writing are also gods of magic. Odin, the chief god of Norse mythology, was a god of wisdom, healing and magic, and credited with uncovering the wisdom of the runes. He was said to practise the secret art of seiðr magic and sorcery, and was the god who uncovered the wisdom of the runes by hanging himself from the branches of the World Tree, Yggdrasil. He also pierced himself with a spear as a sacrifice, in order to call up the runes from the well of the Norns (or Fates). Runes formed the alphabet used by the Vikings for writing magical charms, once more showing a link between writing, moving between the worlds, and magic - the same powers wielded by Thoth.

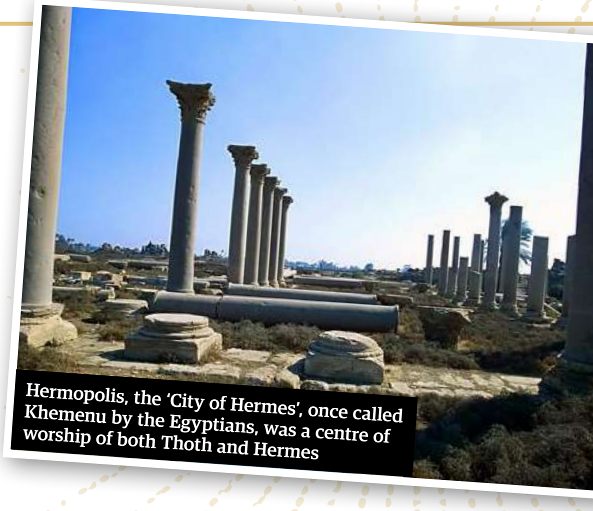


The Norse Allfather, Odin, made a sacrifice to uncover the secrets of the runes from the Well of Urðr

> "Gods could be combined into a composite deity"

and calculations, and was very much thought to maintain equilibrium within the universe. Said to stand at the side of Ra's solar barge as it travelled across the sky, his wife Maāt stood on the opposing side. Thoth played an important role in Egyptian mythology, and while his worship was most prominent in the city of Khemenu - called Hermopolis by the Greeks, the City of Hermes or the City of the Sun God - he was worshipped in many areas of Egypt. The figure of Thoth developed greatly over time, and he later became a mediator between the deities, overseeing battles between good and evil, as well as becoming associated with magic, religion, philosophy and science, and was credited with giving movement to the astral bodies.

The role of the gods in ancient Egypt differs somewhat to gods in other traditions. The Egyptians did not just tell stories to explain the world, but expressed their views of the reality through the relationship between divine forces and how they interact; enter the gods. Each deity represented an area of divinity or force, rather than being seen as individual entities in the same way as people. Gods could be combined into a composite deity, becoming an amalgam of forces and symbolism. Sometimes one god was even said to exist within another deity, when one deity displayed the tendencies of another god, or took on a similar role. Often the gods would be grouped by shared traits, although others combined to highlight how some forces opposed others. One example of this is Amun - the invisible all-pervading creator - being combined with Ra - the god of the Sun and source of all its power and energy - to create Amun-Ra, who bridged both of these aspects. Thoth is linked to the Moon, and one specific aspect of himself is the moon god Iah-Djehuty; he is sometimes depicted with a crescent moon and lunar disk on his head because of this association. In this form, he appears as a man with the head of an ibis, with a focus of commanding times and seasons. He takes the head of a baboon when his focus is equilibrium and balance, as the god Āān. As Sheps he takes the head of a hawk; as Mendes the head of a bull. When depicted in more general terms, he takes the form of an ibis entirely. He is seen as a self-created god, who calculated the creation of the heavens, and indeed as the tongue and very heart of Ra: directing the solar barge across the skies, giving Ra mental reasoning and the speech with which to enact his will.



Hermopolis, the 'City of Hermes', once called Khemenu by the Egyptians, was a centre of worship of both Thoth and Hermes

By the 12th century BCE, Egypt had faced centuries of unrest and battle against the Hittites, and political chaos ensued. It never truly regained its strength. A wave of Hellenisation reached the shores of Egypt by the end of the 4th century BCE, after the conquest of Alexander the Great. The Egyptian people resisted as Ptolemy, a Macedonian Greek general, was instated as king, modelling himself on the Egyptian pharaohs of old. The new Greek ideals entering the country after the conquest had a profound impact on Egyptian religious life. King Ptolemy I introduced the worship of new gods in order to unify the two opposing traditions of the Egyptian people and their Greek rulers; called interpretatio graeca, Greek gods and myths were equated with those of other religions as an easy way to understand the invading culture. This was easily accepted by the Egyptians, who were already used to combining their deities as one. The Egyptian Osiris and Apis grew into the new 'Serapis', a figure joining Greek appearance and Egyptian religious ideas. This god was used as a poster-boy figure for this Greek integration, as the king took a pre-existing belief and capitalised on it, morphing the god into an amalgam of the two, and spreading this worship throughout Egypt for his own ends. The ancient Egyptian god Thoth did not escape this fate, as he was too a victim of this attempt at

> One of the roles of Thoth was as a secretary to Ra in the underworld

integration. Thoth became associated with the Greek god Hermes, as the two ruled over similar forces in the universe.

Hermes was the Greek god of travellers, doorways, boundaries and their transgression, as well as herds, sleep and gymnastics, yet he is most famously known for being an emissary and messenger of the gods. Thoth has also been called a messenger; while some downplay this role and focus on his aspect as a scribe, it is understandable why some would equate the concepts of messenger and acting as an intermediary, particularly with both figures grounded in diplomacy and equilibrium. Hermes is usually depicted with a cap, winged boots, a kērykeion, caduceus or herald's staff as a symbol of peace, often wearing a robe or cape, only later developing into the naked youth we know today. Strangely, Hermes was also known for magic, as his helmet was said to conceal him, and it was he who gave a magical plant to the Odysseus to protect him from Circe. In the Hellenistic period, after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, Hermes grew in popularity, and his feats became embellished and even more celebrated. Some have suggested that, as emissary and messenger, the god was viewed as able to mediate between worlds, the seen and unseen, and because of this his sphere of influence might have extended to divination and magic - like the Egyptian god Thoth.

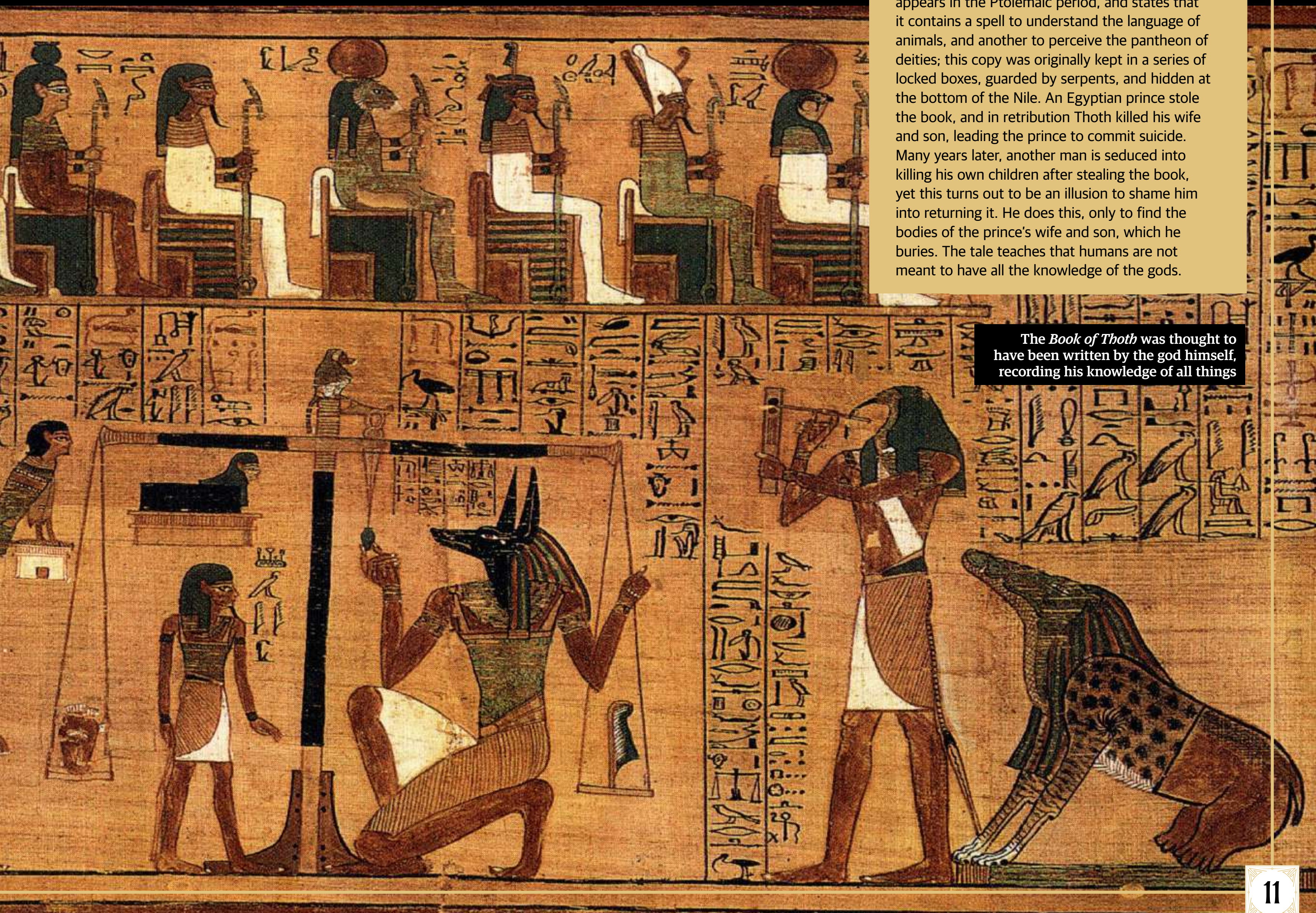
> In the Egyptian creation myth, Thoth adds five days to the year, allowing Geb and Nut to procreate, and birth more gods

Soon, the two gods had been completely conflated through the interpretatio graeca, and seen as one god. By the mid 1st century CE, Thoth was often referred to as 'Thrice Great', stemming from the Egyptian idea of composite deities with many aspects. While the exact meaning of 'Thrice Great' is still unknown, we can understand

The mysterious Book of Thoth

The *Book of Thoth* was said to have been written by the god himself. The 'book' is thought to have actually been a collection of texts, 42 books, in six categories, that were said to contain all of the philosophical knowledge of the Egyptian people. The work is referred to by Clement of Alexandria at the end of the second century CE, who attributes the works to Hermes. The books were thought to have been translated into Greek, and updated with Greek ideals. It's said that books covered the laws, deities and priestly instruction; instructions for how to serve the gods; knowledge of the geography of the world and writing; astrology and astronomy; religious compositions; and, finally, knowledge of medicine. While some have tried to include the *Book of the Dead* as part of the *Book of Thoth*, this was never accepted by the majority since he is only credited with writing part of it.

An account of a fictional *Book of Thoth* appears in the Ptolemaic period, and states that it contains a spell to understand the language of animals, and another to perceive the pantheon of deities; this copy was originally kept in a series of locked boxes, guarded by serpents, and hidden at the bottom of the Nile. An Egyptian prince stole the book, and in retribution Thoth killed his wife and son, leading the prince to commit suicide. Many years later, another man is seduced into killing his own children after stealing the book, yet this turns out to be an illusion to shame him into returning it. He does this, only to find the bodies of the prince's wife and son, which he buries. The tale teaches that humans are not meant to have all the knowledge of the gods.

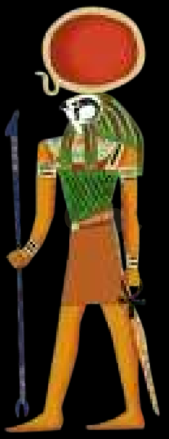


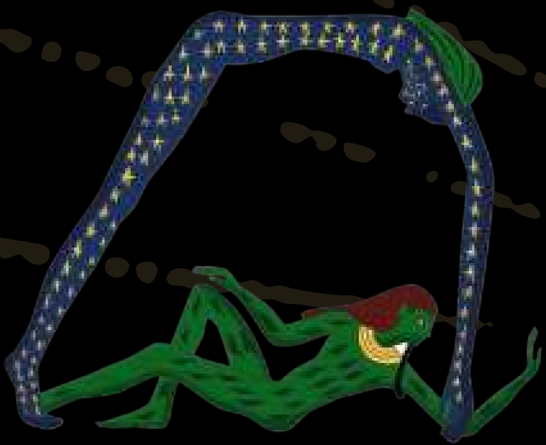
The *Book of Thoth* was thought to have been written by the god himself, recording his knowledge of all things

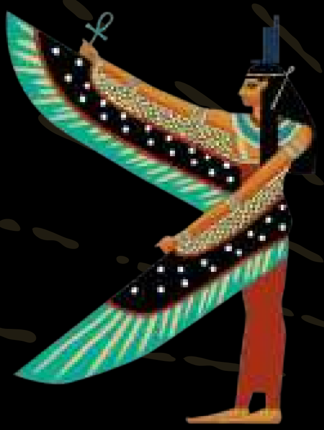
Meet the gods of Egypt

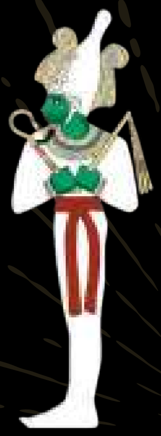
Almost 1,500 deities are known by name and many of them combine with each other and share characteristics. Here are some of the most important

> To the Egyptians, writing was sacred as it gave reliability, and enabled all knowledge of the world to be recorded









Ra

God of the Sun

Ra was Egypt's most important Sun god, also known as Khepri when rising, Atum when setting and the Aten as the solar disc. As the main creator deity, Ra also produced twin gods Shu and Tefnut.

Geb

God of the Earth

As the grandson of Ra and the son of Shu and Tefnut, green-skinned Geb represented the Earth and was usually shown reclining, stretched out beneath his sister-wife Nut.

Nut

Goddess of the sky

As granddaughter of Ra, Nut was the sky goddess whose star-spangled body formed the heavens, held above her brother Geb by their father Shu, god of air.

Isis

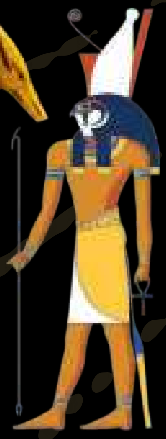
Goddess of motherhood and magic

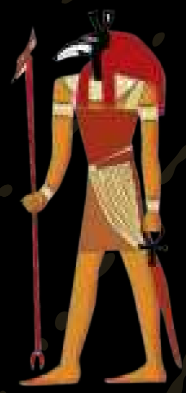
The daughter of Geb and Nut, Isis was the perfect mother who eventually became Egypt's most important deity, 'more clever than a million gods' and 'more powerful than 1,000 soldiers'.

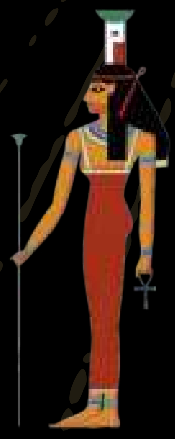
Osiris

God of resurrection and fertility

Isis's brother-husband Osiris was killed by his brother Seth, only to be resurrected by Isis to become Lord of the Underworld and the god of new life and fertility.







Horus

God of Kingship

When his father Osiris became Lord of the Underworld, Horus succeeded him as king on Earth, and became the god with whom every human pharaoh was then identified.

Seth

God of storms and chaos

Represented as a composite mythical creature, Seth was a turbulent god who killed his brother Osiris, only to be defeated by Osiris's son and avenger Horus, helped by Isis.

Nephthys

Goddess of protection

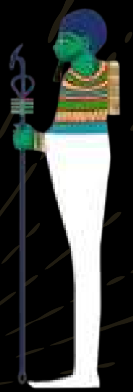
As fourth child of Geb and Nut, Nephthys was partnered with her brother Seth, but most often accompanied her sister Isis as twin protectors of the king and of the dead.

The animal cults of ancient Egypt

The Egyptians greatly respected the natural world, particularly animals whose spirits were worshipped as divine. With Egypt's earliest known art representing animals alongside humans, various creatures were placed in human burials as early as c. 4000 BCE, and the relationship was a fundamental part of Egypt's evolving religion.

Gods could be portrayed entirely as an animal, or in human (anthropomorphic) form with an animal's head, as imitated by masked priests. Many deities also had a sacred creature, which was worshipped in life then mummified at death.

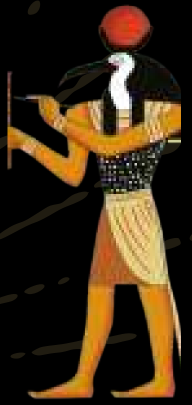
The most important of these was the Apis Bull of Memphis. Believed to house the soul of the creator god Ptah when alive, it was then worshipped as the underworld god Osiris after its death when the next bull was selected to continue the cycle. Other sacred bulls and cows were worshipped elsewhere in Egypt, with other animal cults including the sacred crocodiles of Sobek, representing the power of the king, and the sacred rams of the creator god Khnum. There were also the ibis and baboons representing the god Thoth, and the cats sacred to the feline deity Bastet. Such creatures were mummified in their millions as physical manifestations of the divine and symbols of Egypt's devotion to its creatures.



Ptah

God of creation and craftsmen

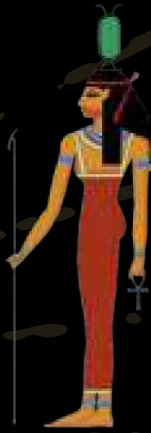
Ptah was a creator god and patron of craftsmen whose temple at Memphis, known as the 'House of Ptah's Soul' – 'hut-ka-ptah' – is the origin of the word 'Egypt'.



Thoth

God of learning and the moon

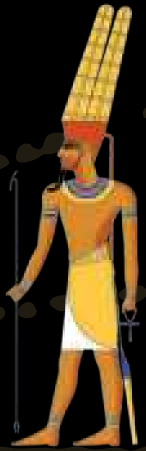
As the ibis-headed god of wisdom and patron of scribes, Thoth invented writing and brought knowledge to humans. His curved beak represented the crescent moon, and his main cult centre was Hermopolis.



Neith

Goddess of creation

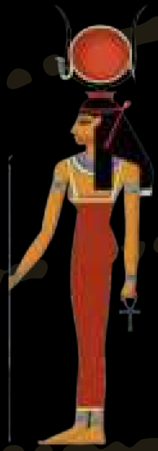
As a primeval creator deity represented by her symbol of crossed arrows and shield, warlike Neith, 'Mistress of the Bow', was worshipped at her cult centre Sais in the Delta.



Amun

God of Thebes

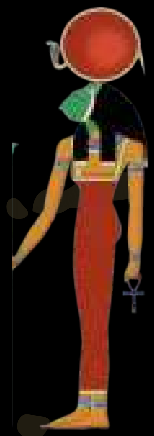
Initially the local god of Thebes, whose name means 'the hidden one', Amun was combined with the Sun god Ra to become Amun-Ra, king of the gods and Egypt's state deity.



Hathor

Goddess of love, beauty and motherhood

Often represented as a cow or a woman with cow ears, Hathor symbolised pleasure and joy and as a nurturing deity protected both the living and the dead.

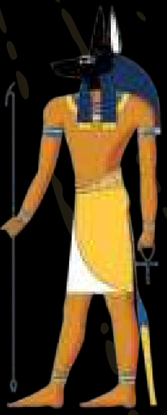


Sekhmet

Goddess of destruction

The lioness goddess Sekhmet controlled the forces of destruction and was the protector of the king in battle. Her smaller, more kindly form was Bastet the cat goddess, protector of the home.

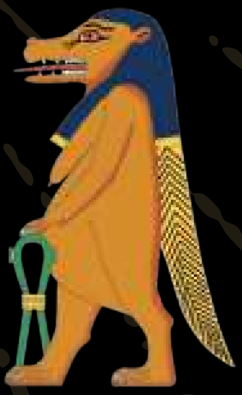
> "Gods could be portrayed in animal or human form, or as a human with an animal's head"



Anubis

God of embalming and the dead

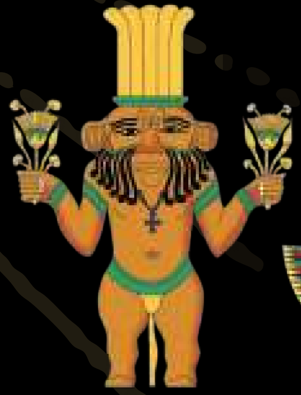
The black jackal god Anubis was the guardian of cemeteries and god of embalming, who helped judge the dead before leading their souls into the afterlife.



Taweret

Goddess of the home and childbirth

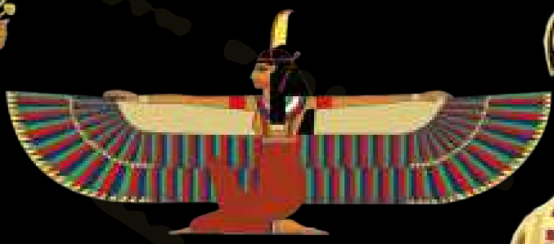
Taweret was a knife-wielding hippopotamus goddess who guarded the home, a protector of women and children who was invoked during childbirth to scare away evil forces.



Bes

God of the home and childbirth

Bes was a dwarf-like god of the household who protected women and children alongside Taweret, like her carrying knives for protection, in his case he carried musical instruments for pleasure.



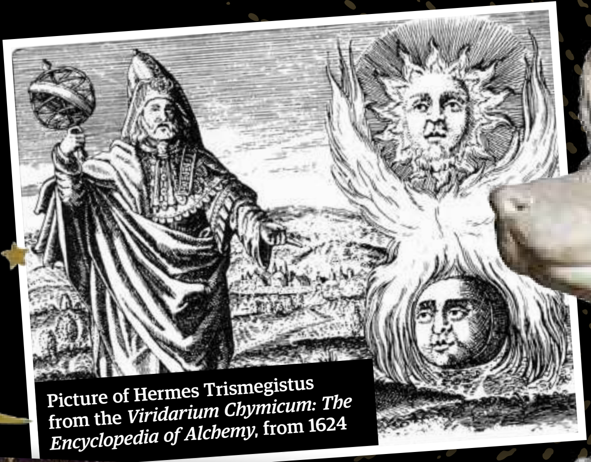
Maat

Goddess of truth and justice

As the deity who kept the universe in balance, Maat's symbol was an ostrich feather against which the hearts of the dead were weighed and judged in order to achieve eternal life.

Thoth, magic, and Hermes Trismegistus

Greek god Hermes, the son of Zeus



Picture of Hermes Trismegistus from the *Viridarium Chymicum: The Encyclopedia of Alchemy*, from 1624

Hermes Trismegistus is depicted on the floor of the Cathedral of Siena in Italy

Hermanubis combined psychopomps Hermes and Anubis, resulting in a god of truth and the priesthood

Thoth's importance as the personification of the mind of god, and the god who organises and directs all governing forces of the known universe; the veneration of this god was some of the greatest in the land, and might go some way to explaining such a grand epithet. Most attribute the first instances of this name as appearing in the writings of Athenagoras of Athens and in a fragment from Philo of Byblos, while others take this back to Egyptian cult texts from the 2nd century BCE. Through this three-fold aspect of Thoth, and his association with Hermes, the composite - and more complex - figure of Hermes Trismegistus was born. The 10th century Suda, a Byzantine encyclopaedia, explains that Hermes was given the name of Trismegistus because there is one divine nature within the trinity; we can view this in a similar way to how Christianity has the divine trilogy of God, Jesus and the Holy Ghost, who are all separate yet integral.

Hermes Trismegistus was patron of philosophy, alchemy, magic and astrology, and credited as the instigator of one the most mystical philosophies known to date. Historically, many considered Hermes Trismegistus to be an actual figure: a wise prophet, a contemporary of Abraham. Only one thing is for certain, the figure of Hermes Trismegistus is shrouded in mystery, yet credited with passing down sacred and ritual knowledge. Some say he wandered the lands of Egypt before even the time of Moses. Others believed that he was a contemporary of Abraham, passing on sacred knowledge to him. Others considered him one of a long line of prophets, passing on the one truth - the prisca theologia - from God, in the same vein as the Persian Zoroaster, and some believe he is an ancestor of the Prophet Muhammad himself.

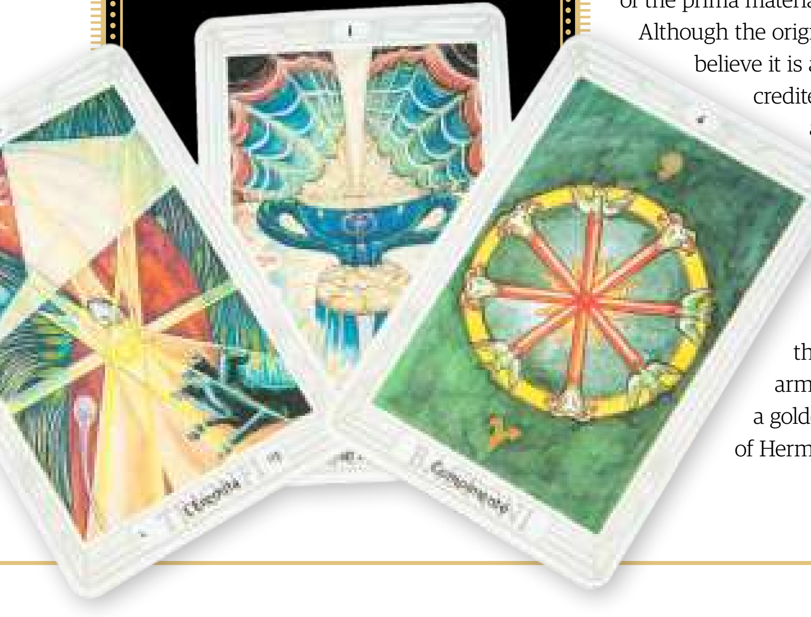
Hermes Trismegistus was believed to be the author of countless texts conveying ancient

> Alchemy was the study of how to turn one substance, like base metals, into another - for instance, gold

wisdom. Many say he is the author of the 42 books previously credited to Thoth, while Plato mentioned a hall containing 9,000 years of ancient wisdom at the Temple of Neith, at Sais in the Nile Delta. Some of these texts are collectively referred to as the *Hermetica*, which detailed knowledge of magic, the universe and the mind, in the form of a dialogue between a master and student – indeed the master was Hermes Trismegistus himself. This body of work became the basis of Hermeticism, dealing with magical plants and gemstones, making talismans, summoning spirits, with astrology and the drawing down of the stars. One of the most important of the *Hermetica* texts was the *Asclepius*, which explained how to trap demons and spirits inside statues, while his *Poimandres* from the *Corpus Hermeticum* detailed the creation of the world by the Son of God, known as the Word, reminiscent of the biblical Genesis. These texts are generally thought to originate between 100 to 300 CE, and can be divided into two types: those dealing with philosophy, and those dealing with magic. Hermeticism focused on using magico-religious practices to transcend the constraints of the physical body. These teachings became popular through the Hellenistic period, linked to Platonism and Stoicism, with an element of Jewish and Persian influences, and saw a revival with the alchemy of the Middle Ages, right through to the Renaissance.

Crowley's Thoth tarot deck

The Thoth tarot was a deck published by Ordo Templi Orientis in 1969, after both of the creators had passed away. Painted by Lady Frieda Harris, based on the mystical instructions from Aleister Crowley, and paired with his book on the deck, *The Book of Thoth*, written between 1938 and 1943. The depictions on each of the cards are inspired by various mystical systems, as well as philosophy and science, in an attempt to reinvigorate and reinterpret the traditional meanings, as is encouraged for all initiates to the Order of the Golden Dawn as part of their spiritual journey. Crowley changed many of the Major Arcana names, as well as renaming pages to princesses, and knights to princes in the Court Cards. Another major difference in the deck is that he modified the corresponding Hebrew letters and astrological associations of the cards, based on his own reading of their symbolism in line with his teaching in his *Book of the Law*. He also gave a title to each of the Minor Arcana cards. While the accompanying book is meant to act somewhat as an instruction manual, Crowley's deck is infamous for its mystic nature and inaccessibility for the uninitiated. A modified version of the deck, including two original cards by Lady Frieda Harris but rejected by Crowley, is still available from U.S. Games Systems.



The Thoth tarot deck is still incredibly popular with people today, seen to hold great divinatory wisdom

Various legends about the comings and goings of Hermes Trismegistus have been developed over the centuries. Some say that Hermes Trismegistus appeared in Islamic literature, in the form of the prophet Idris, with his writing being recorded by Ikhwan al-Safa, a secret society of Muslim philosophers translated as 'The Brethren of Purity'. Others go so far as to claim that he travelled from Egypt to visit advanced races living in outer space, and even to Heaven itself, before returning to Earth; he is also credited with building the pyramids at Giza. The Emerald Tablet sheds light on these beliefs, as it is seen as one of the foundations of Hermetic practice written by Hermes Trismegistus himself. The tablet is associated with the secret of the prima materia and the Philosopher's Stone.

Although the origin of the tablet is murky, many believe it is another example of a source credited with being older than it actually is, and in reality the first reference to it is an Arabic text dating to between the 6th and 8th centuries BCE: *The Book of Balinas the Wise on the Causes*. Legend tells that the tablet was found in the arms of a corpse, seated on a golden throne under a statue of Hermes in Tyana. The tablet was not translated into Latin until the 12th century BCE, and a translation was found amongst Isaac Newton's papers, and it was picked up extensively by later mystical scholars.

While the belief that the texts – and indeed the figure of Hermes Trismegistus – were ancient, an analysis by Isaac Casaubon in the 17th century examined the language used, and revealed that these were indeed much later than believed and could not have been written by the mystical prophet. This opinion has since been challenged by many.

> The macrocosm-microcosm theory teaches that the 'part reflects the whole' throughout the cosmos – 'as above, so below'

In conclusion, it seems that the texts attributed to the ancient prophet were Egyptian-Greek texts written by multiple authors from the 1st and 2nd century CE and after, incorporating beliefs and texts from much earlier Egyptian traditions linked to the god Thoth, and indeed updated to incorporate Greek ideas, initially for the political aim of social integration and the acceptance of a new branch of rulers in Egypt. The figure of Hermes Trismegistus did indeed act as a much needed historical basis for the tradition, and drew together the disparate ideas, neatly packaging them as a coherent belief system with a central figure. While the validity of Hermes Trismegistus and his writings are highly questionable, and an absolute falsehood for most scholars, there is certainly no doubt that his influence has reached far and wide, across continents and across history, to capture the imaginations of many, and create a mystical tradition that countless people still adhere to today.

Ptolemy I Soter depicted as the Pharaoh of Egypt, now in the British Museum, London

© Alamy, Getty Images, Joe Cummings, Kym winters, Creative Commons; Roland Unger, Einsamer SchÅtze

Betrayal of the Knights Templar

In seven years the Order was hunted, dismantled and executed. Was this justice for their sacrilegious practices, or were they the victims of a twisted plot?

Written by Frances White

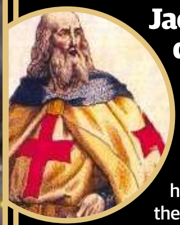
Jacques de Molay was calm. Through seven long years of accusations, trials, torture, denials and confessions, he had been anything but calm, but as the frail, bearded man was led out onto the Île aux Juifs on the Seine, he did not weep or tremble. A crowd had gathered to watch the old man die, and a pyre had been erected on the small island, ready to be lit and claim his soul. De Molay was stripped of the rags that were once clothes, down to his threadbare shirt, then the guards strapped his thin, pale body to the stake. Finally, the silent man spoke. He asked to be turned to face the cathedral of Notre Dame, and that his hands be freed so he could die in prayer. These requests were granted, and De Molay bowed his head in silent prayer as the pyre was lit. The flames grew fast, and as the tongues of fire lashed up around his body, he spoke once more, his voice rising above the crackle of the flames.

"God knows who is in the wrong and has sinned!" he proclaimed. "Misfortune will soon befall those who have wrongly condemned us; god will avenge our deaths. Make no mistake, all who are against us will suffer because of us!" The flames rose higher, but the pain did not tell on his face. "Pope Clement, King Philip - hear me now!" His voice roared. "Within a year you will answer for your crimes before the presence of god!" After these final words, De Molay fell silent, and the flames claimed his soul.

Before the year was over, Pope Clement and Philip IV were dead. Clement finally succumbed to a long illness on 20 April 1314, and the French king died soon after a hunting accident on 29 November 1314, aged just 46. De Molay's brotherhood was all but extinct, but the curse of the last grand master of the Knights Templar would live on in infamy. Jacques de Molay's famous last words may not have actually been spoken

Key Figures

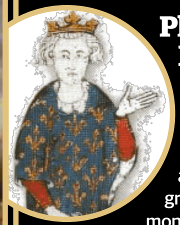
The men who destroyed the Order, and those who fought to defend it



Jacques de Molay

1243 – 18 MARCH 1314

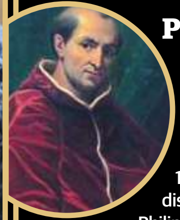
The 23rd and last grand master of the Knights Templar. Little is known of De Molay's early life, but he subsequently became the most well known Templar. He aimed to reform the Order, a goal he was never able to fulfil.



Philip IV of France

1268 – 29 NOVEMBER 1314

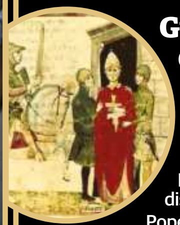
Also known as the Iron King, Philip led France from a feudal country to a centralised state. He had great belief in an all-powerful monarchy, and it was his ambition to fill thrones worldwide with his relatives. As well as destroying the Knights Templar, he also expelled Jews from France.



Pope Clement V

1264-1314

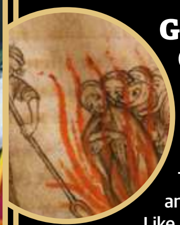
Born Raymond Bertrand de Got, Clement was made pope on 5 June 1305. There is some dispute over his loyalty to Philip IV, with some painting him as nothing but a tool for the French king, while others believing he showed surprising resistance. Either way, he is now remembered as the pope who suppressed the Knights Templar.



Guillaume de Nogaret

1260-1313

Keeper of the seal to Philip IV of France, Guillaume had previously played a role in the dispute between Philip and Pope Boniface; apparently persuading the king to kidnap the pope. He also had a central part in the fall of the Knights Templar, forcing members to give testimony against the Order.



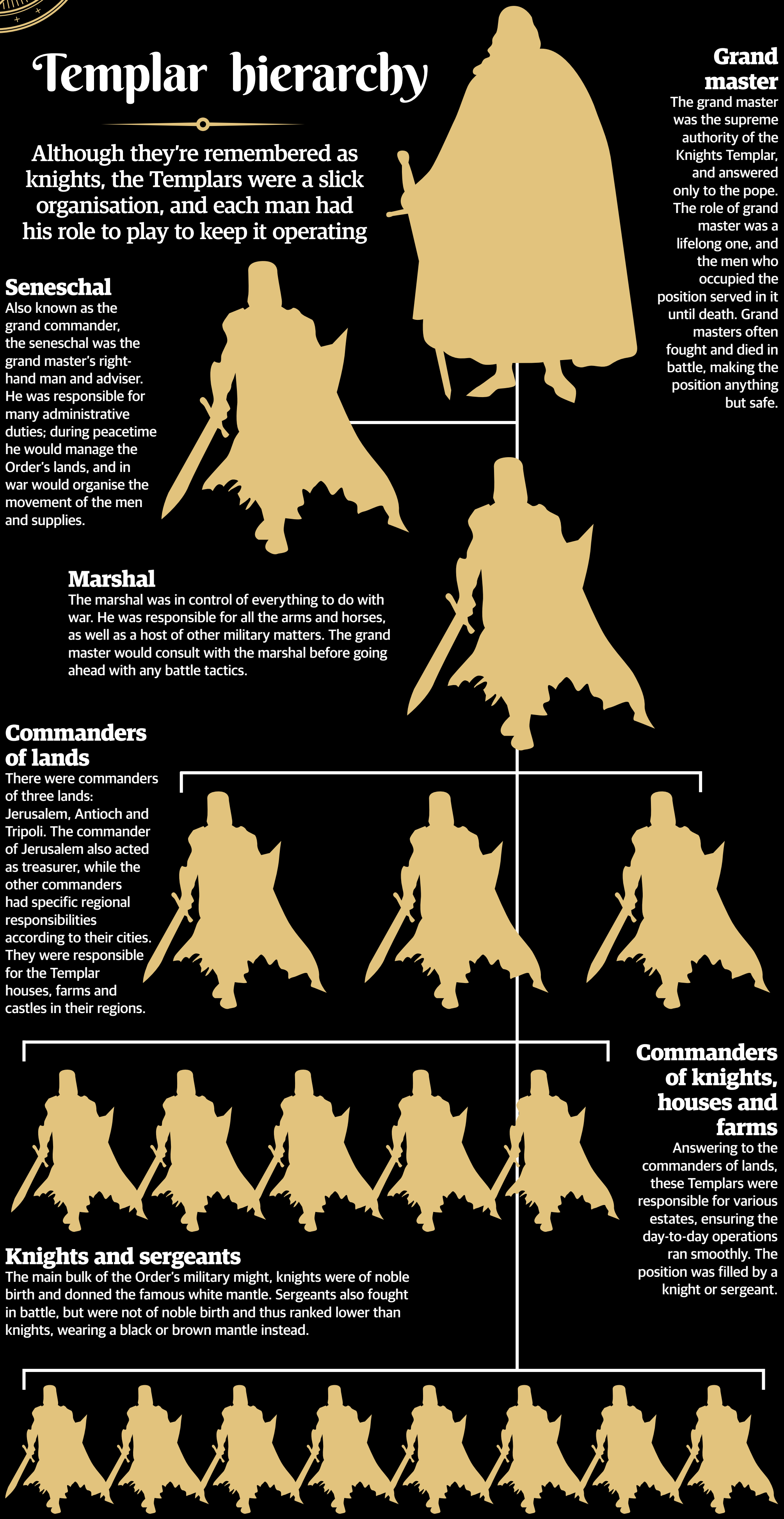
Geoffroi de Charney

UNKNOWN – 1314

Serving as preceptor of Normandy, Charney was a member of the Knights Templar from a young age and rose through the ranks. Like much of his order, he was arrested, tortured and confessed, then later retracted his statement. Charney was the only one of the three senior leaders arrested to rally by his master's side and deny the charges.

Templar hierarchy

Although they're remembered as knights, the Templars were a slick organisation, and each man had his role to play to keep it operating



Grand master

The grand master was the supreme authority of the Knights Templar, and answered only to the pope. The role of grand master was a lifelong one, and the men who occupied the position served in it until death. Grand masters often fought and died in battle, making the position anything but safe.

Seneschal

Also known as the grand commander, the seneschal was the grand master's right-hand man and adviser. He was responsible for many administrative duties; during peacetime he would manage the Order's lands, and in war would organise the movement of the men and supplies.

Marshal

The marshal was in control of everything to do with war. He was responsible for all the arms and horses, as well as a host of other military matters. The grand master would consult with the marshal before going ahead with any battle tactics.

Commanders of lands

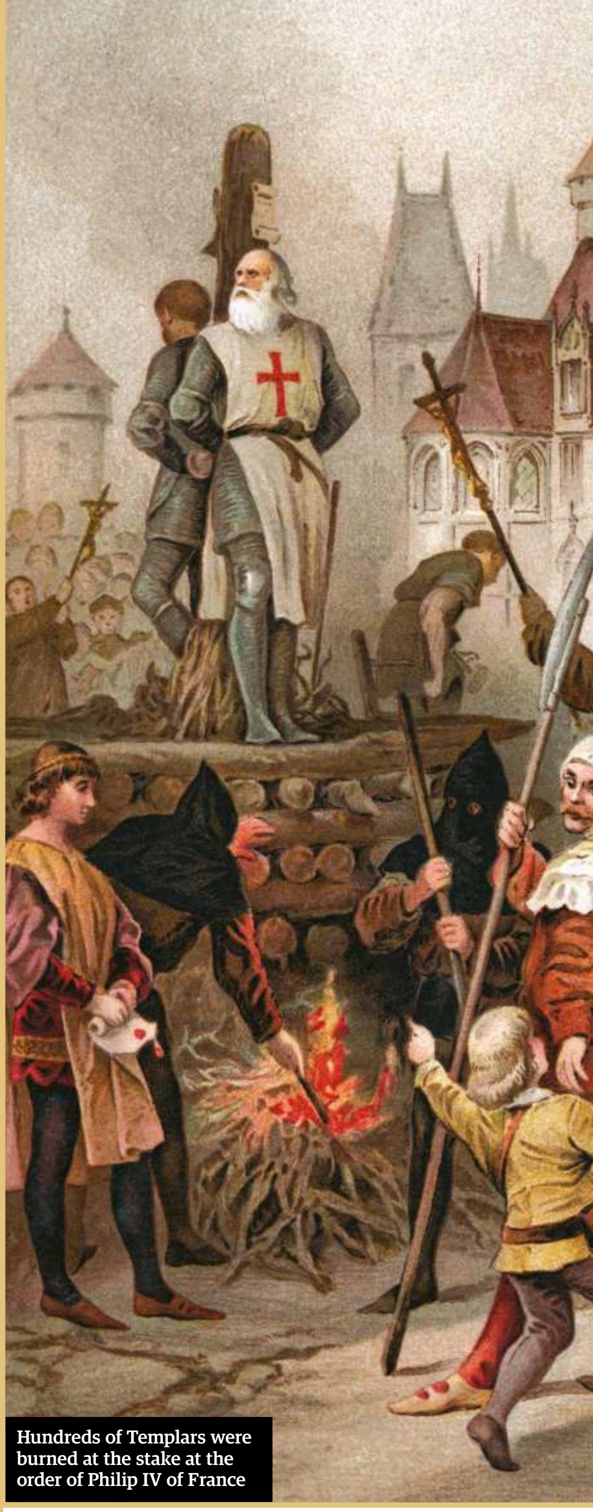
There were commanders of three lands: Jerusalem, Antioch and Tripoli. The commander of Jerusalem also acted as treasurer, while the other commanders had specific regional responsibilities according to their cities. They were responsible for the Templar houses, farms and castles in their regions.

Commanders of knights, houses and farms

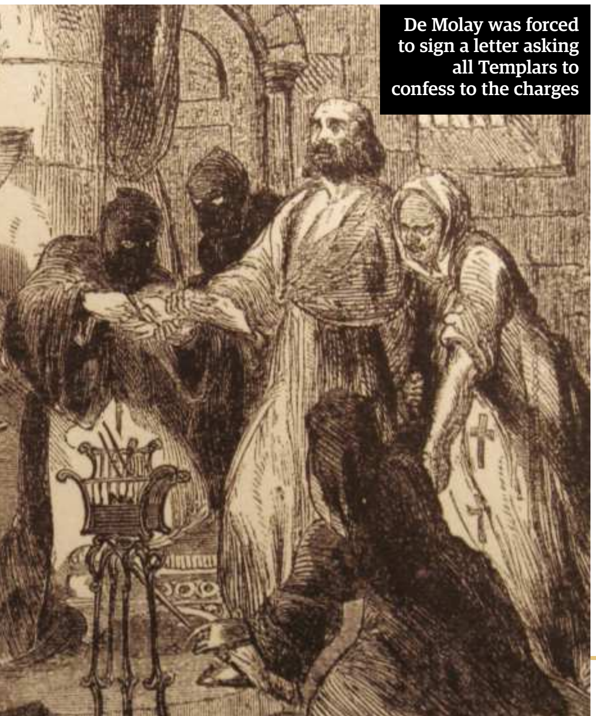
Answering to the commanders of lands, these Templars were responsible for various estates, ensuring the day-to-day operations ran smoothly. The position was filled by a knight or sergeant.

Knights and sergeants

The main bulk of the Order's military might, knights were of noble birth and donned the famous white mantle. Sergeants also fought in battle, but were not of noble birth and thus ranked lower than knights, wearing a black or brown mantle instead.



Hundreds of Templars were burned at the stake at the order of Philip IV of France



De Molay was forced to sign a letter asking all Templars to confess to the charges

by the grand master himself. Like so many aspects of the Knights Templar, they have been distorted by myth and legend, and today we just don't know if he cursed his betrayers with his dying breath. Thanks to their sudden and dramatic fall, an array of rumours, myths and conspiracies have persisted about the mysterious order, obscuring their true humble beginnings and devastating end that rocked 14th-century Europe.

After the city of Jerusalem was captured by Christian forces in the First Crusade, many European pilgrims chose to make the long journey to the Holy Land. However, this route was not safe for the Christians to travel along, so several knights charged themselves with protecting the roads from robbers and brigands. This guild of knights was founded on Christmas Day 1119 on the spot that marks the place where Jesus was crucified. As their headquarters were located on the Temple Mount, they became known as 'Knights of the Temple', or the Knights Templar.

Although the Order began in virtual poverty, relying on donations to survive, they quickly became one of the most powerful monastic orders in the Medieval world. With papal approval, money, land and eager young noblemen poured into the Templars' resources. Serving as the West's first uniformed standing army in their white tunics emblazoned with a fiery red cross, the Templars achieved legendary status in battle.

This reputation as god's warriors was encouraged by their victory at the Battle of Montgisard, where 500 Templars helped an army numbering a few thousand defeat 26,000 of Saladin's soldiers. As well as being a mighty military force, they also controlled a vast financial network, which has been recognised as the world's first modern banking system. Many nobles who wished to join the crusades placed their wealth under the control of the Templars, who then issued them with letters of credit. This could be used at Templar houses around the world to 'withdraw' their funds. By the 13th century, the Templars were one of the most powerful and wealthy organisations in the world, entirely unaware that a dramatic and terrible fate awaited them. However, it would not be the Muslims in the East who would bring about their downfall, but their fellow Christians in the West.

After the fall of Acre in 1291, the West lost its last Christian possessions in the Holy Land. The Templars were cast out from their origins and stripped of their raison d'être. When Jacques de Molay ascended as grand master in 1293, he had one goal in mind - to reclaim what the Templars had lost. De Molay travelled across the West to rustle up support; he received it from Pope Boniface and Edward I of England. But the crusade was a disaster, and De Molay lost 120 knights trying to land in Syria. In 1306, the Templars supported a coup in Cyprus that forced Henry II to abdicate in favour of his brother. These actions did not go by unnoticed. Many monarchs in countries with powerful Templar presences began to feel uneasy - with their power, what was to stop the Templars supporting baron uprisings in their own countries? The Templars had also been very vocal in their desire to form their own state, similar to Prussia's Teutonic Knights and the Knights Hospitaller, another Catholic military order, in Rhodes.

In 1305, De Molay received a letter from Pope Clement V, then based in France, concerning the possibility of merging the Templars with the Hospitaller. De Molay was ardently against the idea, but in 1306 Clement invited both grand masters to France to discuss the issue further, instructing them to "come hither without delay, with as much secrecy as possible." De Molay arrived in 1307, but Foulques de Villaret, the leader of the Hospitaller, was either delayed or sensed something was amiss, as he did not arrive, and while the pope and De Molay waited, an entirely different subject of discussion was raised.

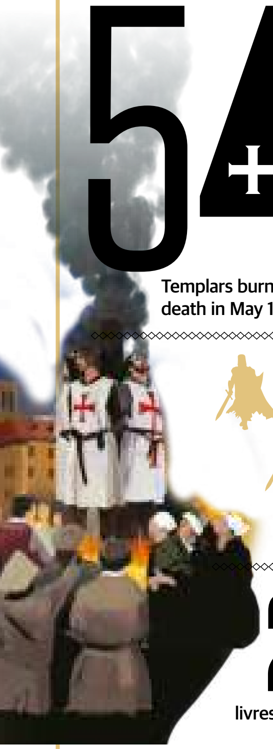
Two years previously, an ousted Templar had accused the Order of many criminal charges, and although they were generally believed to be false, King Philip IV of France had recently brought them back into discussion. De Molay, tiring of the ludicrous accusations, asked Clement to look into the matter to rid him of the whole messy situation. On 24 August, Clement wrote to Philip, saying

TEMPLAR MYSTERIES

Holy Grail

The Holy Grail is perhaps the item that the Templars are most closely associated with. From Wolfram von Eschenbach's Medieval romance *Parzival* to Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, throughout history the Templars have been linked to the mysterious relic. Often in fiction the Templars are portrayed as the guardian of the cup that Jesus used in the Last Supper, or even a deep and dramatic secret. Interestingly, the city in which the Templars were launched, Troyes, is also the place that the very first grail romance was written. Any actual link between the Templars and the grail likely emerged due to the fact that stories of the grail began to become popular in the 12th and 13th century, when the Templars were at the height of their power. Although they were part of society, the Templars were shrouded in secrecy even in their day, so it is no wonder such a mysterious vessel was linked to the Order.

IN NUMBERS



20,000
members at their peak

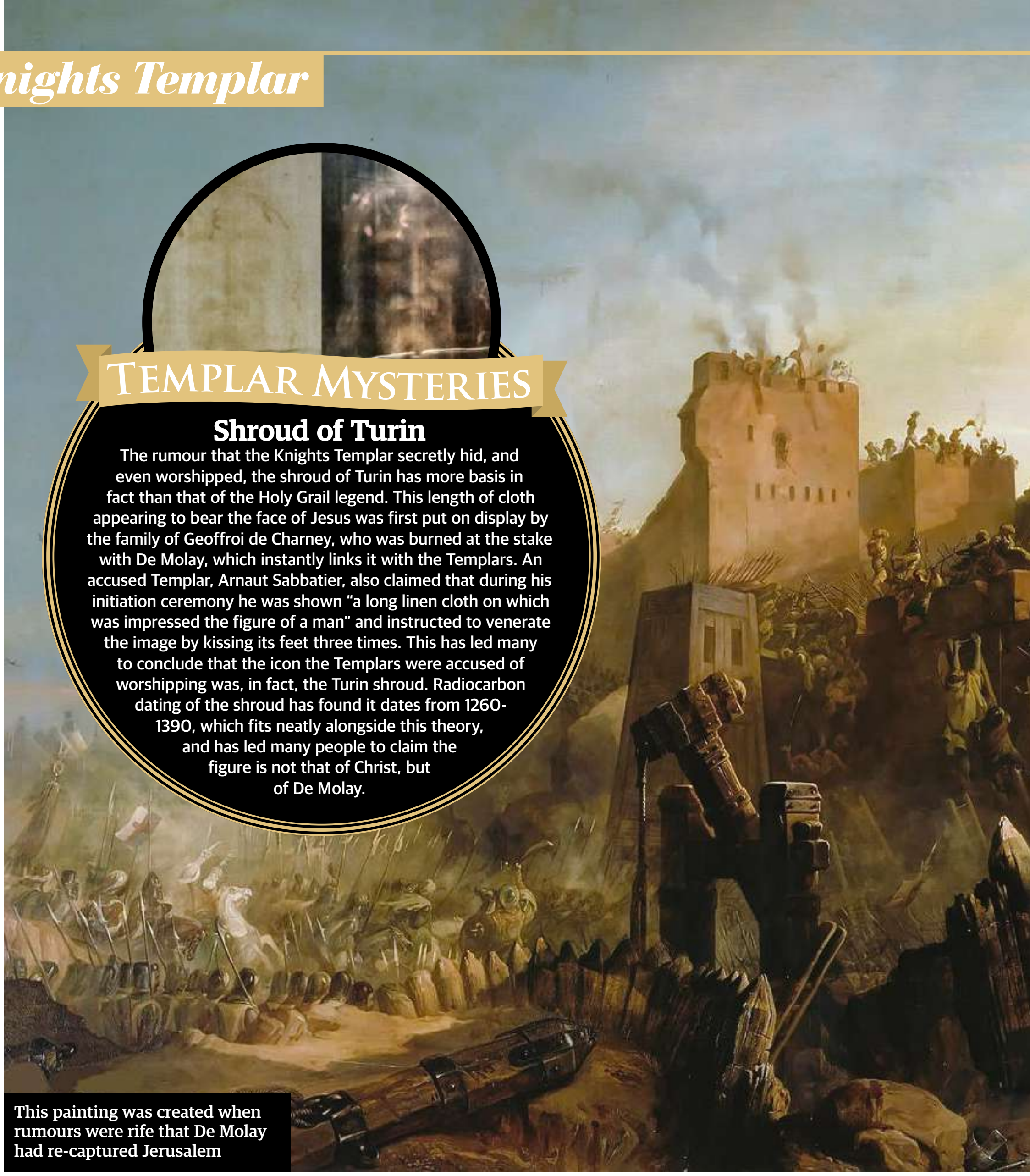
54+
Templars burned to death in May 1310

15
witnesses gave evidence against the Order before 12 May 1310 – compared to 198 after

597
witnesses defended the Order before 12 May 1310 – compared to 14 after

9 knights were originally gathered to protect pilgrims

200,000
livres paid by the Knights Hospitallers to the French king as 'compensation'



TEMPLAR MYSTERIES

Shroud of Turin

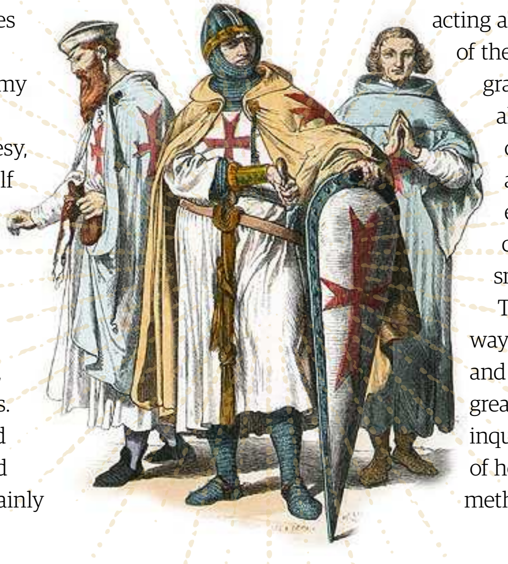
The rumour that the Knights Templar secretly hid, and even worshipped, the shroud of Turin has more basis in fact than that of the Holy Grail legend. This length of cloth appearing to bear the face of Jesus was first put on display by the family of Geoffroi de Charney, who was burned at the stake with De Molay, which instantly links it with the Templars. An accused Templar, Arnaut Sabbatier, also claimed that during his initiation ceremony he was shown "a long linen cloth on which was impressed the figure of a man" and instructed to venerate the image by kissing its feet three times. This has led many to conclude that the icon the Templars were accused of worshipping was, in fact, the Turin shroud. Radiocarbon dating of the shroud has found it dates from 1260-1390, which fits neatly alongside this theory, and has led many people to claim the figure is not that of Christ, but of De Molay.

This painting was created when rumours were rife that De Molay had re-captured Jerusalem

that he did not believe the accusations but would start an inquiry "not without great sorrow, anxiety and upset of heart," and advised Philip to take no further action. Philip did not listen. At dawn on Friday 13 October, the king's forces arrested every Templar they could find in France.

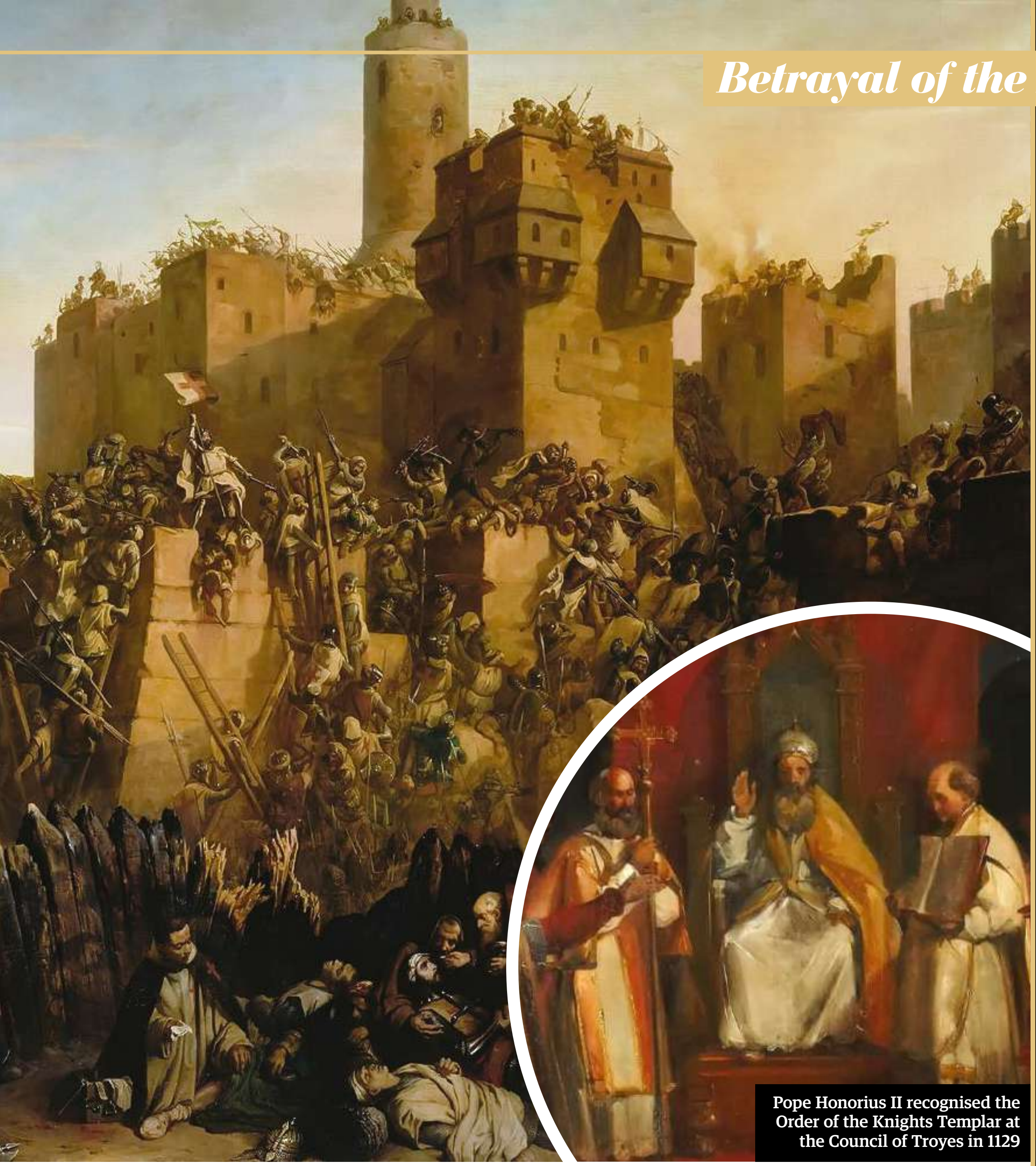
Philip IV's harsh actions were not unprecedented; he had a reputation as a rash and violent king. Philip had previously clashed with Pope Boniface VIII, and launched an anti-papal campaign against him. Believing France should have centralised royal power, the feud escalated and ended with Philip attempting to kidnap the pope in 1303 to bring him to France to face charges of heresy. The shock ultimately killed Boniface, whose successor, Benedict XI, was then only in the position for nine months before his own death. This allowed the king to appoint his selection, Clement, to the papacy. Philip had also previously arrested wealthy Italian bankers in the city, stripping them of their assets; then his target switched to the Jews, who were thrown out of the kingdom. These actions can be easily explained – Philip had inherited a kingdom on the brink of financial crisis, and he also believed that his authority was above that of the pope. Not only did he owe the Templars a great deal of money, but their link to the church made them the perfect choice for establishing the power of the monarchy. With their plans to form their own state, the Order had basically sealed their own fate. The Templars had to fall for Philip to rise.

When the Templars in France were arrested, the charges put against them were heresy, sodomy, blasphemy and denying Christ. By charging them with heresy, Philip could paint himself as a soldier of Christ, similar to that of his sainted grandfather Louis IX. But his actions were a violation of the church in Rome's orders, and Clement was furious. Philip had likely believed the pope to be a frail and infirm old man and certainly not a threat, but Clement wrote angrily to Philip, accusing him of violating every rule in this "act of contempt towards the Roman Church."



This did little to help the brothers of the temple. Some 15,000 Templars now resided in the prisons of France, many of whom were not nobles or knights, but mere farmers and shepherds. De Molay didn't escape capture either; just a day after acting as pallbearer at the funeral of the king's sister-in-law, the grand master was arrested along with the rest of his order. Philip seized their land and property and set about ensuring he obtained the confessions he needed to smash the Order to pieces.

There was one very simple way of acquiring confessions, and Philip employed it to great success: torture. Philip's inquisitors utilised a variety of horrific and demoralising methods to break the men's



Pope Honorius II recognised the Order of the Knights Templar at the Council of Troyes in 1129

wills. The rack, which stretched a victim's body and dislocated his joints, was frequently used, as was strappado, which involved binding a victim's hands with rope that ran up a pulley, raising him in the air, then dropping him rapidly. The soles of prisoners' feet were greased then set alight with flame, teeth were pulled and limbs were flayed. The men were confined to cold, dark cells, and those who did not survive the torture were secretly buried. One anonymous writer in 1308 wrote of the conditions in the cells: "The human tongue cannot express the punishment, afflictions, miseries, taunts, and dire kinds of torture suffered by the said innocents in the space of three months, since the day of their arrest, since by day and night constant sobs and sighs have not ceased in their cells, nor have cries and gnashing of teeth ceased in their tortures… Truth kills them, and lies liberate them from death."

It is of no surprise that when the Templars were brought to trial, many confessed to the various offences put against them. The Order was faced with five initial charges: the renouncement of and spitting on the cross during initiation; the kissing of the initiate on the navel, mouth and posteriors; the permitting of homosexual acts; that the cord they wore had been wrapped around an idol they worshipped; and that they did not consecrate the host during mass. Over the trials, the charges against the Templars grew and grew in number, ranging from burning infants to abusing virgins and even forcing young brethren to eat the ashes of the dead. Although these charges seem outrageous and somewhat farfetched today, Philip was operating at a time when paranoia and suspicion surrounding god and the devil was so rife that it could be reasonably believed that such devilish practices had infiltrated the church.

In hearings presided over by the inquisitors who had overseen the torture, 134 of 138 brothers confessed to one or more of the charges. De Molay himself signed a confession after undergoing the flaying of his limbs and testicles. This was quickly followed by matching confessions from all senior members of the Order. However, when Clement insisted the confessions be heard before a papal committee, De Molay and his men did an about turn. Safely away from Philip's control, De Molay

The Templars across Europe

When the pope ordered Christian monarchs across Europe to arrest Templars, not all were willing

British Isles

Edward II was initially sceptical about the Templars' guilt and had no reasons to view them as a threat. He wrote to the pope in defence of the Order, but was eventually forced to arrest and try many Templars. Initially, torture was not allowed and all the Templars pleaded innocent, but when the pope's inquisitors took over, confessions came fast. However, they were spared burning and simply forced to repent publicly. Those who refused were incarcerated until death.

Italy

The situation in Italy varied. The Papal States unsurprisingly acted at once, but in Lombardy there was widespread support for the Order. For the number of Templars confessing to the accusations, there were just as many claiming that the others were lying. In Florence, despite using torture, only 6 of 13 Templars confessed.

Cyprus

King Amaury de Lusignan had earned his crown thanks to the Templars, so was understandably reluctant to arrest them. However, the leading Templars were eventually incarcerated after putting up a brave resistance. At trial, there were many witnesses who praised the Templars, but the king was brutally murdered during the trial and Henry II, enemy of the Templars, regained the throne. Torture began almost immediately, and many perished while protesting their innocence.

Portugal

The Templars in Portugal got off lightly compared to their counterparts elsewhere. King Denis I refused to persecute the Order, but could not overrule the papal bull to abolish the Templars. Instead, the Templars re-branded themselves as the 'Order of Christ' with the assured protection of Denis I, who also negotiated with Clement's successor for the Order to inherit the Templars' assets.

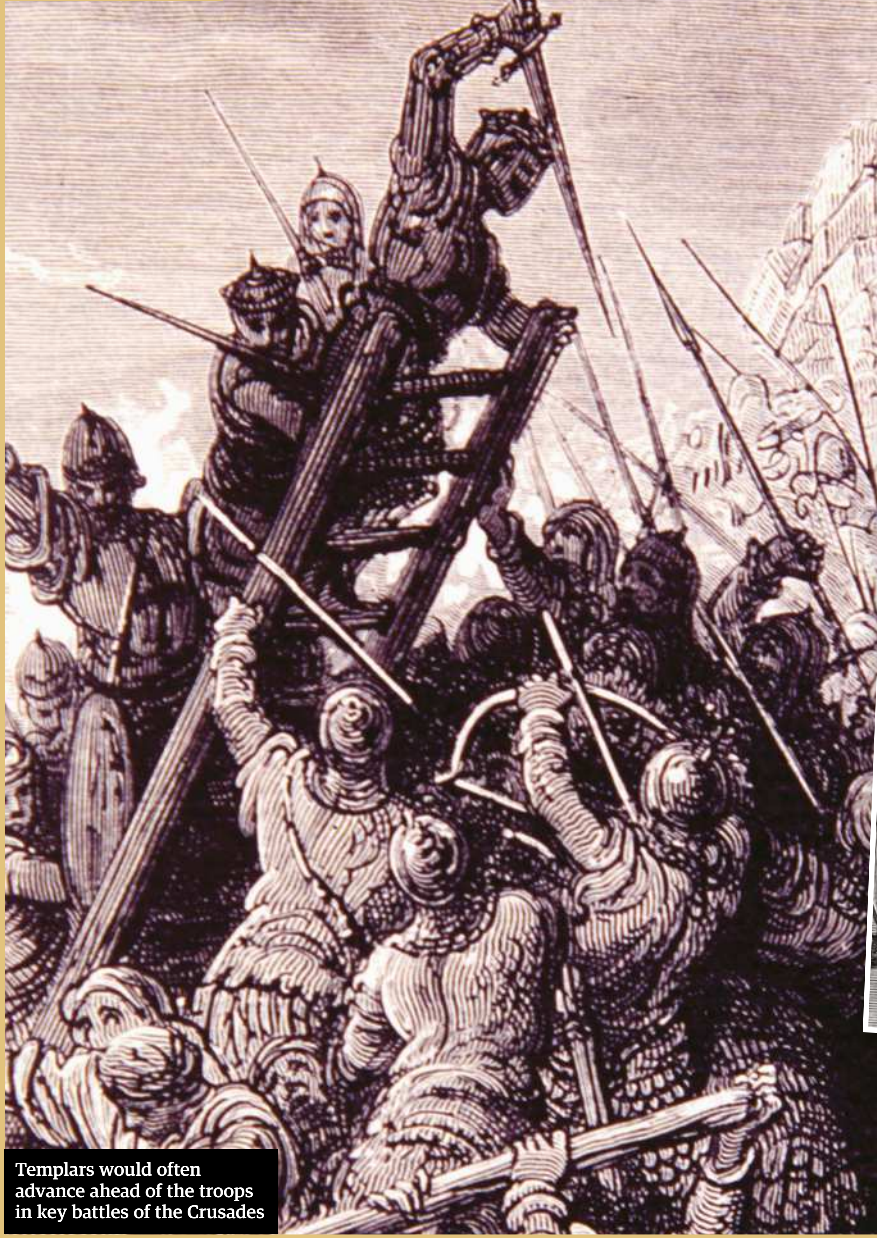
Iberian Peninsula

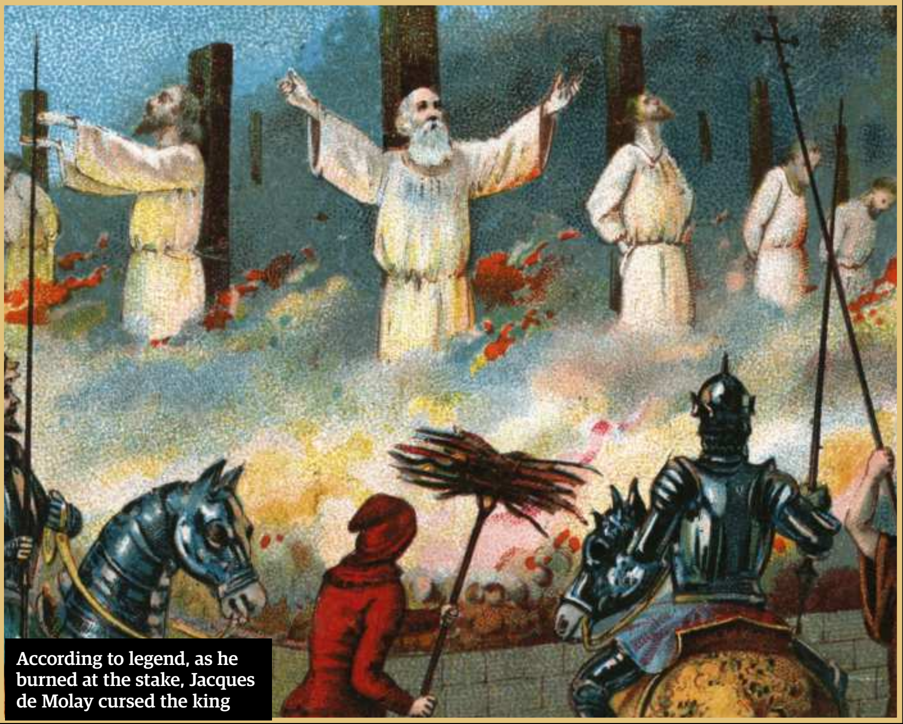
Despite initial doubts, James II of Aragon ordered the arrest of most of the Templars on 6 January 1308, before the pope ordered him to do so. However, many of the Templars set up defences in their castles and appealed for help, which unfortunately did not come. All of the Templars pleaded their innocence. With torture prohibited, no confessions were secured, and no Templar was condemned to death for heresy.

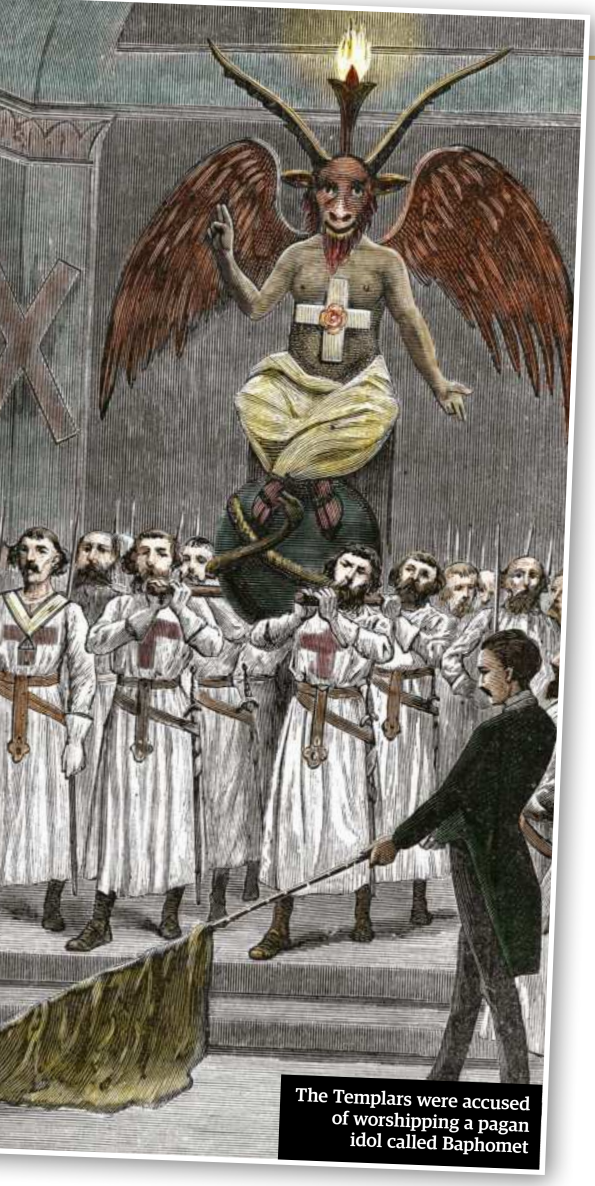
Guilty or innocent?

Was there any truth to the crimes the Templars burned for?

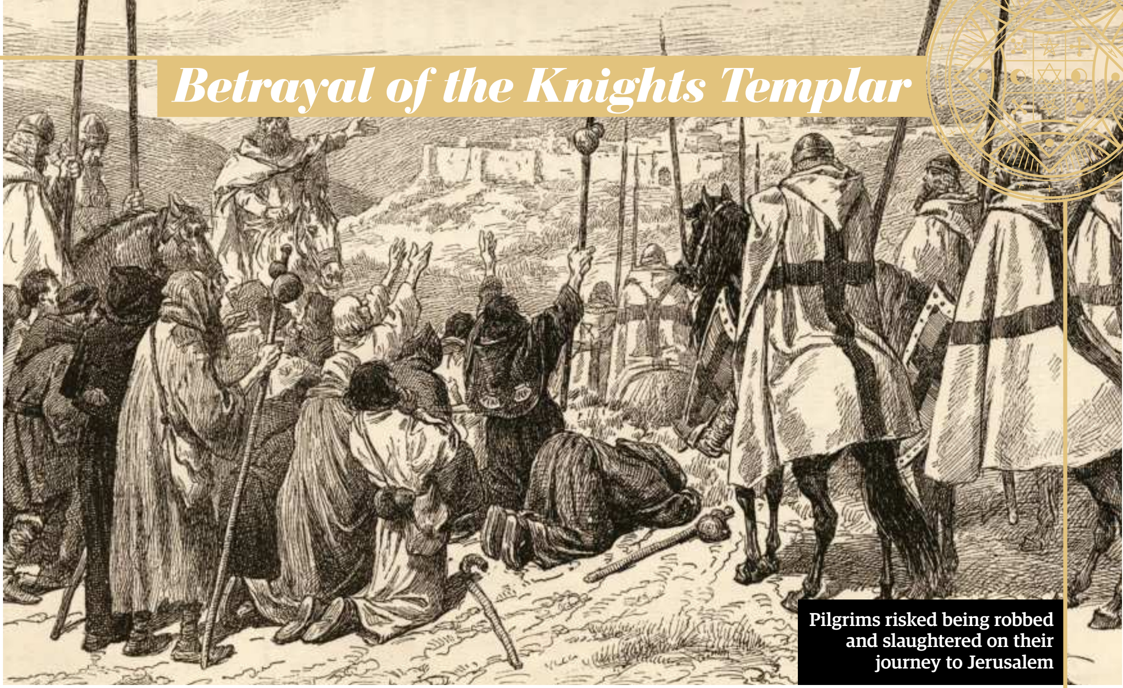
	FOR	AGAINST
SPITTING ON THE CROSS	Although often written as one of Philip's many trumped-up charges, there is evidence that this accusation had basis in fact. Not only did a number of Templars confess to it, but Philip's spies, who secretly joined the Order, confirmed it. A recent discovery of the 'Chinon Parchment' in the Vatican library further confirms the charges. Under questioning in 1308, Jacques de Molay admitted to such practices.	Although De Molay confirmed that spitting on the cross took place, chalking this up to heresy shows a lack of understanding. De Molay said these practices were designed to harden a Templar to the torture he would be subjected to by Saracens, training them to deny their faith "with the mind only and not with the heart." Philip's spies may very well have witnessed such acts, but they likely misunderstood their purpose.
WORSHIP OF AN IDOL CALLED BAPHOMET	The charge put against the Templars read "they surrounded or touched each head of the idols with small cords, which they wore around themselves next to the shirt or the flesh." Unlike Philip's other charges, this accusation was so specific to the Templars that it's difficult to believe he didn't have some inside information. Many knights did admit to worshipping this idol, which usually took the form of a life-sized head. We know for a fact that the Knights Templar possessed heads, such as the head of St Euphemia of Chalcedon. The fact that the Order kept these heads means that they certainly could have worshipped them in some way.	Only nine Templars in the Paris trials admitted to head worship, and descriptions of this 'idol' differed across Europe. In one version it was "covered in old skin, with two carbunkles for eyes," in another it was made of gold and silver; one had three or four legs, while in another account the head had horns. These conflicting accounts heavily indicate that these confessions were the result of torture. This idol was allegedly named 'Baphomet', but it may be the case that this was a mistranslation of 'Mahomet', ie Muhammad. Either way, if the Templars did indeed worship such an idol, it seems unusual that their temples were not filled with clear symbols of this figure.
HOMOSEXUALITY	The charges the Templars faced were that "they told the brothers whom they received they could have carnal relations together... that they ought to do and submit to this mutually." As the Templars took vows of celibacy and were not permitted to wed, it was believed that they engaged in homosexual activity to satisfy their desires. Although few confessed, many testified that sexual activity was not prohibited. The fact that so many denied it under torture is an indication of just how shamefully sodomy was viewed, giving the Templars all the more reason to hide the truth.	This was the most common accusation used during this era to discredit or ruin anyone. Philip had already charged Pope Boniface VIII with very similar accusations, and it seemed to be his favourite tool to use against his enemies as it was difficult to disprove. However, despite the torture, only three Templars confessed to sodomy in the Paris trials. Although De Molay was quick to confess to denying Christ, he vehemently opposed this accusation, stating that the Templar rules clearly prohibit any such behaviour with harsh punishment, such as expulsion from the Order.


Templars would often advance ahead of the troops in key battles of the Crusades


According to legend, as he burned at the stake, Jacques de Molay cursed the king



The Templars were accused of worshipping a pagan idol called Baphomet



Pilgrims risked being robbed and slaughtered on their journey to Jerusalem

retracted his confession, claiming he only gave it initially due to the torture he suffered. The other Templars followed suit and Philip's plans for a swift and brutal end to the Order vanished.

In an attempt to convince Clement, Philip visited him at Poitiers and sent 72 Templars to confess before him. He had his forces dispense pamphlets and give speeches concerning the depravity of the Templars. Philip warned that if the pope didn't act, he would have to be removed in order to defend Catholicism. Harangued, bullied and now under virtual house arrest, Clement gave in and ordered an investigation into the Templars. De Molay and the other senior members retracted their retractions and Philip's grand plans were in motion once again.

The Templars had nothing in the form of legal council; De Molay expressed desires to defend his order but was unable to as a "poor, unlettered knight." In 1310, two Templars with legal training made an impressive defence against the charges - insisting that the Templars were not only innocent but also at the sharp end of a cruel plot. The tide was beginning to turn in the Templars' favour, so Philip made a swift and brutal decision. On 12 May 1310, 54 Templars who had previously withdrawn their confessions were burned at the stake as relapsed heretics and the two Templar defenders disappeared from prison.

With nobody to defend them, the Templar case crumbled. Under extreme pressure from Philip and likely wishing to rid himself of the whole matter once and for all, Clement issued an edict that officially dissolved the Order. This didn't mean the brothers were guilty, but it was the end of the Knights Templar for good. Much to Philip's annoyance, a second papal bull was issued that transferred the Templars' wealth to the Hospitaller. Finally, the bull 'Considerantes Dudum' allowed each province to deal with the Templars residing there as they saw fit. The fate of the leaders, however, was in the hands of the church.

De Molay and three of his senior members languished in prison, awaiting news of their fates. Finally, on 18 March 1314, the leaders were led out to a platform in front of Notre Dame to hear their sentences. All four were old men; De Molay was, by now, at least 70, while the others ranged from 50-60. Due to their earlier confessions, they were found guilty of heresy and condemned to life imprisonment. Two of the men silently accepted their fate, but faced with living out the rest of his life starving in a dank, dark cell as the last leader of a humiliated and disgraced order, De Molay finally found his voice. To the shock of the crowd, and the horror of the cardinals, the grand master and his loyal master of Normandy, Geoffroi de Charney, loudly protested their innocence. They denied their confessions, insisting their order was nothing but holy and pure. For seven years of imprisonment, De Molay had failed to defend his order, but now he was doing it - with his life.

This was completely unexpected, and left the cardinals confused about what to do. When the news reached Philip, he was furious. He ruled that as the Templars were now professing their innocence, they were guilty of being relapsed heretics, the punishment for which was death by fire. Before the end of the day, De Molay and De Charney were dead. Instead of living out his final days disgraced in a cell, De Molay's final moments of bravery led many to hail him as a martyr.

The remaining Templars were not released from their monastic vows and many were subjected to penances such as lengthy prison sentences. Others joined the Knights Hospitallers and some were sent to live out their remaining days in isolated monasteries. Even with these numbers accounted for, there are still question marks over what happened to the tens of thousands of brothers across Europe. The Order's archive was never found along with the majority of their treasures, leading many to believe that the Templars received some sort of warning, allowing many to escape prior to the initial arrests. Various conspiracy theories regarding the fate of the remaining Templars have been concocted, from the proposition that they escaped on a fleet of ships to western Scotland to them becoming Swiss freedom fighters. Although we do know the sad tale that ended the Order, the mystery of what became of the remaining Templars is likely to stay unsolved.

TEMPLAR MYSTERIES

French Revolution

When Louis XVI was executed by guillotine at the height of the French Revolution, according to some sources a man jumped up onto the platform and dipped his fingers in the blood. He cried out "Jacques de Molay, thus you are avenged!" Then the crowd cheered. The legend that the Templars would enact revenge upon the French monarchy who had damned them was a popular rumour at the time, so speculation that they played a key part in starting the revolution was rife. This legend works alongside the idea that the remaining Templars went underground to continue their work, so relies on quite a leap of faith. But nevertheless, Jacques de Molay did indeed have his revenge.

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Haruspicy

People see signs in everything, including animal entrails. The ancient Romans searched through the bodies of sacrificed animals to see what the future held…

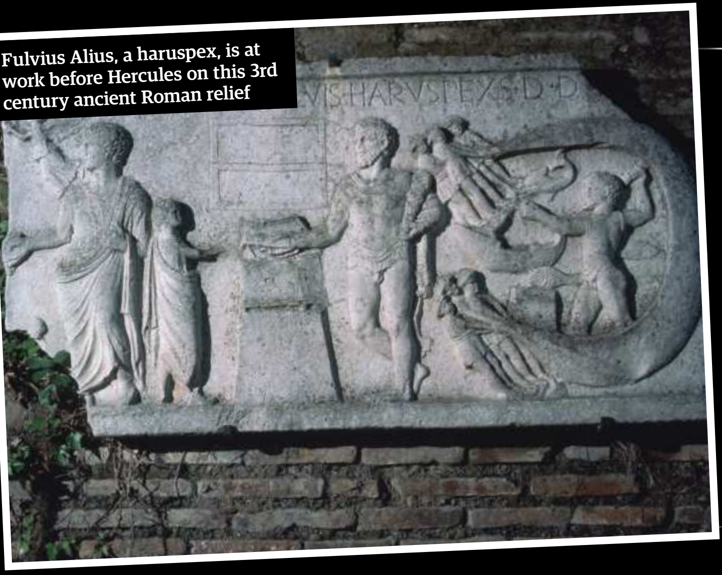
Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

The ancient Etruscans developed an advanced civilisation in Italy before the Roman Empire, possessing sophisticated forms of art and culture, and it was no different when it came to divination. One practice that became popular with the ancient Estruscans was haruspicy. In fact, it was so popular that, as with art and culture, it eventually made its way to ancient Rome.

With the practice tracing all the way back to at least the third millennium BCE, a haruspex, someone trained in haruspicy, could predict the future by reading omens found in the entrails of animals like sheep and poultry. To interpret the divine, they would ritually slaughter livestock as a sacrifice, butcher it, examine the size, shape, colour and markings of the animal's internal organs, primarily the liver but also the gall bladder, heart and lungs, and then roast the meat to share in a sacred meal with celebrants. The sacrifice usually took place during ceremonies where the Sun god could influence the entrails' appearances.

Haruspices would charge people to ask a question, to which they would be able to answer 'yes' or 'no' by studying the entrails, weighing up the positive and negative omens and seeing which one prevailed. As divination was a trusted and elaborate practice, haruspices had to undergo extremely specialised training in order to be taken seriously. A manual called the *Bārûtu*, or 'Art of the Diviner', was circulated from around 600 BCE or earlier, and took up 135 clay tablets.

It's believed that Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas à Becket consulted a haruspex before an expedition against Brittany



Fulvius Alius, a haruspex, is at work before Hercules on this 3rd century ancient Roman relief

"A haruspex, someone trained in haruspicy, could predict the future by reading omens found in the entrails of animals like sheep"

An ancient Roman haruspex inspects the entrails of a sacrificed bull in this art piece displayed at Paris' Musée Du Louvre

After the practice, which was directly derived from the Etruscan religion, was adopted by the Romans, it also became popular with both Christian apostates and pagans, and continued to be regularly used well into the Middle Ages. The Babylonians were also famous for haruspicy, which is mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel 21:21: "For the king of the Babylon standeth at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination; he shaketh the arrows to and fro, he inquireth of the seraphim, he looketh at the liver."

In modern society, slaughtering your own livestock is often frowned upon, so diviners have been known to substitute the sacrificial animal for eggs, instead cracking them open and examining the insides. It is believed that ancient haruspices used to read the entrails of animals because it was a lot more ceremonious and solemn than cracking an egg and presenting the findings.

Sol Invictus (the 'Unconquered Sun') was the official sun god of the later Roman Empire and a patron of Roman soldiers

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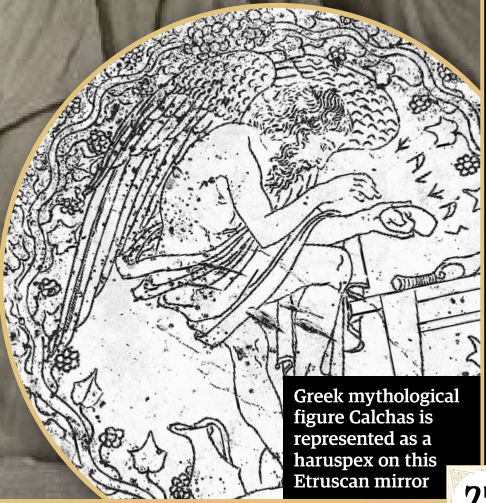


Greek mythological figure Calchas is represented as a haruspex on this Etruscan mirror

Renaissance magic

The passion for knowledge and how to use it led thinkers deep into a mysterious world where the boundaries between nature, supernature and religion were far from clear

Written by Derek Wilson

In the 15th and 16th centuries the western and near-eastern worlds were home to three major religions – Christianity, Islam and Judaism. All had their intellectual elites with their own convictions about the cosmos and man's place in it. There also existed a multi-faceted paganism, which saw the world as populated with an array of spirit beings, beneficent and malign, who constantly intervened in the lives of humans. All thinking participants in this rainbow-hued speculation had one thing in common: they all agreed that life had meaning. The scholars of these great religions might have continued to work within their own traditions were it not for a series of events in the century 1440-1540 that brought about the most far-reaching intellectual revolution in our history – a revolution that later ages came to call the 'Renaissance'.

> In 1489 Marsilio Ficino was accused of magic before Pope Innocent VIII

There were three powerful factors that brought about this transformation. The first (c.1440) was the invention of a printing press that used moveable type. Before this, books had been expensive, hand-written products that could only be read in libraries or in the homes of wealthy collectors. Now that printing was a fast-growing industry, scholars and students could buy their own copies of mass-produced works and exchange their own ideas with each other much more easily.

The second event added significantly to the number of books available. In 1453 the great city of Constantinople, capital of the Eastern Christian Empire, was captured by Muslim Turks. Among the citizens who fled from this invasion were leading intellectuals who took with them several of their precious ancient texts. The boundaries of academic debate now widened to embrace both newly available religious/philosophical thinking and re-interpretation of traditional beliefs.

The third event was an even more radical understanding of Christian truth. Around 1520, thinkers and preachers in various parts of Europe began to challenge various aspects of orthodox Church teaching. This came to be known as the Reformation. The combination of these influences – and not forgetting the pagan superstition, which was felt by people at all levels of society – produced a large array of ideas and beliefs that led to vigorous debate, persecution and, eventually, to war.

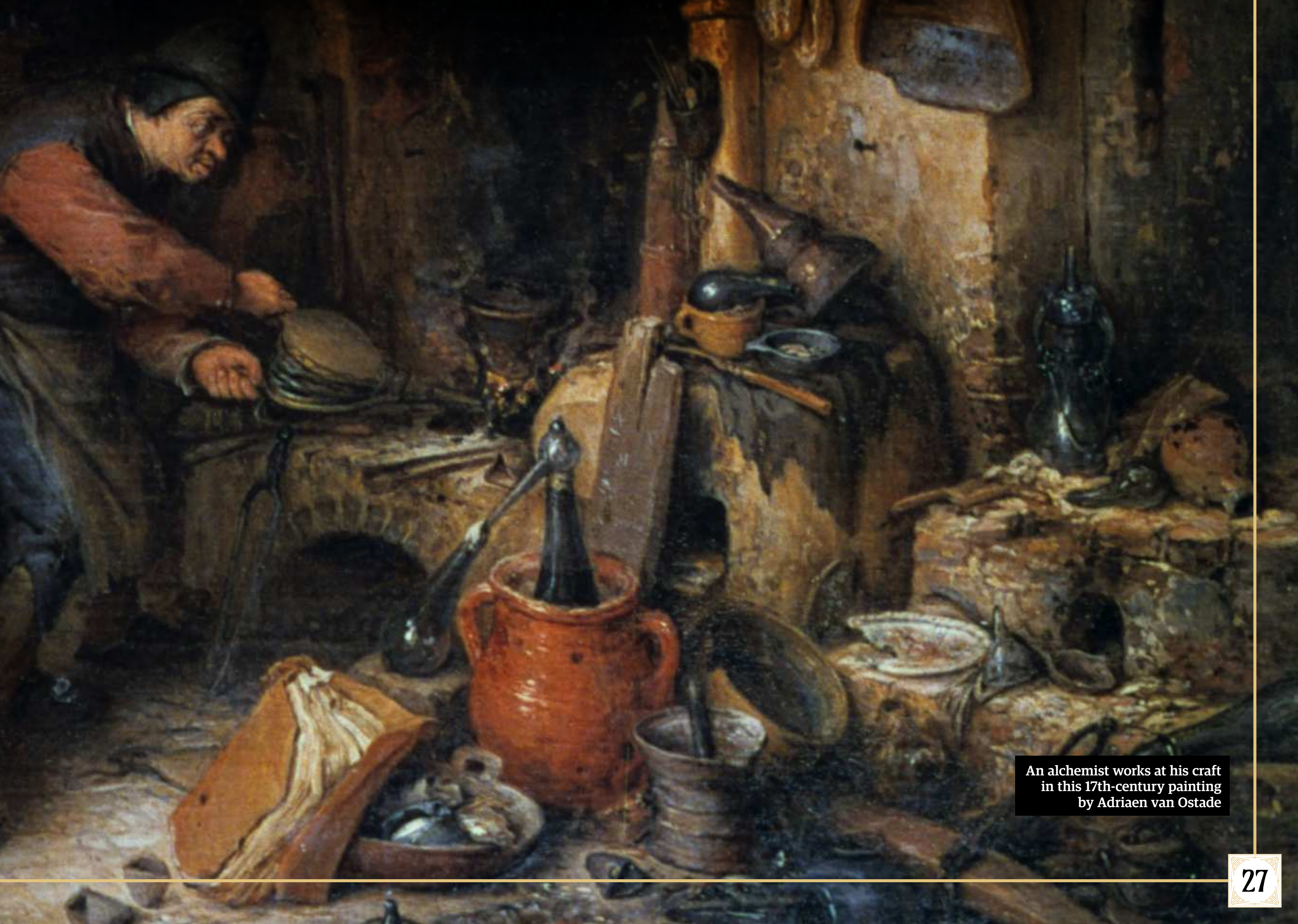
The first 'factory' creating this new thinking was North Italy. Scholars working in universities such as Florence and Bologna or in the households of wealthy patrons – merchant princes, rulers of city states or senior ecclesiastics – were much involved in studying the works of classical antiquity – the great philosophers, poets and historians of Greece and Rome who were the founders of their own culture. When the refugees from Constantinople arrived they brought, as well as their own religious, poetic and historical writings, writings of classical authors, which had been long lost in the West but preserved in the East, some of them translated into Arabic. Scholarly Jews also found themselves forced to flee their homes in these years, some from the conquering Muslims in the East and some from Spain, where a purge by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella led to the expulsion or forced conversion of Jews in 1492. As a result, students of the Hebrew Wisdom literature, and especially of that esoteric branch known as Kabbalah, were drawn to the Italian centres of intellectual activity and found themselves debating with their Christian and Muslim counterparts.

To advanced Renaissance thinkers it now seemed obvious that the three great religions must all owe their origins to a more fundamental source of truth and wisdom. This 'prisca theologia' was ardently sought by Renaissance scholars. It was – or so they thought – the gateway to what the ancient Greeks called 'gnosis' (knowledge) – and also to what they labelled 'exousia' (authority/power). The two were inseparably linked, for the person who understood the nature and workings of the temporal and spiritual realms could use that knowledge in a variety of ways. Such men were magi or magicians.

Everyone in medieval society believed in magic, the ability to manipulate the forces latent in nature. The ranks of those initiated into the occult (supernatural or mystical knowledge) included the local wise woman, the herbalist, the apothecary, the alchemist, the astrologer and the necromancer. Church leaders were ardent in warning against malign magic but none doubted the reality of harnessing the forces of nature and supernature. Many clergy, for example, cast horoscopes. There was no clear distinction between theological and philosophical understanding of the workings of the universe. If God had endowed certain herbs with medicinal properties to relieve human suffering, could he not also have arranged the motions of heavenly bodies to assist in the wellbeing of mankind? The distinction between village folklore and philosophical speculation might appear to be absolute but in reality any difference boils down to degrees of intellectual sophistication.

Let us, for the moment, restrict our debate to the profound Renaissance thinkers who were striving to frame an orderly understanding of the workings of the universe. The lead in these deliberations was taken by a group in Florence founded by Marsilio Ficino. It was known as the Platonic Academy because it took its inspiration from the followers of the 6th-century BCE Athenian philosopher, Plato. The Academicians were, however, Neoplatonists because they belonged to a long tradition of philosophers who sought to relate the teaching of the Greek master to later intellectual/spiritual developments, particularly the advent of Christianity. For Ficino and his friends an unbroken chain of gnosis stretched right back, via Plato, to the prisca theologia.

Neoplatonism rejected a clear-cut distinction between matter and spirit. Everything in the universe was suffused by spiritual entities, all of which interacted to control terrestrial life, the movements of the spheres and the activities of the Creator and his angelic cohorts in heaven.



An alchemist works at his craft in this 17th-century painting by Adriaen van Ostade

The branch of philosophy to which Neoplatonism belongs is called 'metaphysics', the study of what lies above and beyond the physical universe that we apprehend with our five senses. To understand the workings of the cosmos was to be in a position to manipulate it – in other words, to practise magic. Metaphysicians identified three categories of magic. Natural magic harnessed the forces present on earth. This embraced herbalism, using the properties of plants to create medicines but also nostrums capable of affecting personality. But it also extended to 'reading' the human body and the use of fire, air and water in changing the composition of natural substances. From the latter the science of chemistry would grow but it also embraced the concept of 'transmuting' basic elements, such as changing lead into gold. The second category was celestial magic, which concerned studying the movements of heavenly bodies and their influence on human behaviour and destiny. The third branch was ceremonial magic, which involved 'conjuring' spiritual beings to do one's bidding. A necromancer might consort with the dead to discover buried treasure or perform spells to harm his enemies.

It can be seen how all of these have their appeal to human beings 'trapped' in a universe they do not understand, and captive, also, to their own inner compulsions – ambition, greed, lust or even, simply, the desire to be happy and healthy.

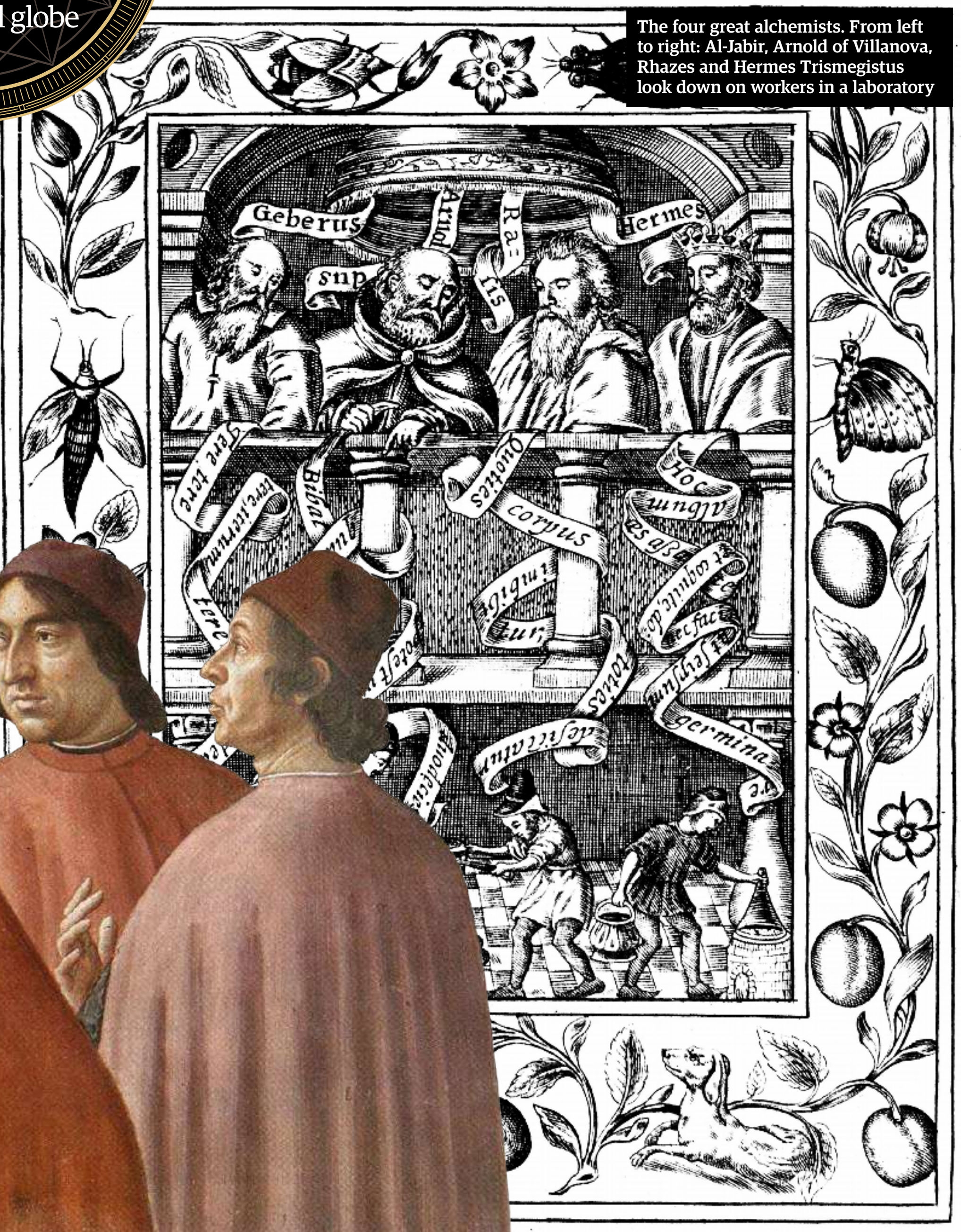
Preachers and moralists were not slow to point out the dangers of dabbling in matters beyond what God allowed. Early in the Renaissance period a popular legend began circulating about a certain Georg Faust whose intellectual pride and insatiable curiosity drove him into the arms of the devil. At the end of the 16th century, Christopher Marlowe turned this story into a play – *Doctor Faustus*. He presented his central character as one who had mastered all branches of human knowledge and found them wanting until he eventually discovered magic:

"These Metaphysics of magicians,
And Necromantic books are heavenly;
Lines, circles, scenes, letters and characters,
Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires,
O, what a world of profit and delight,
Of power, of honour, of omnipotence
Is promised to the studious artisan?
All things that move between the quiet poles,
Shall be at my command…"

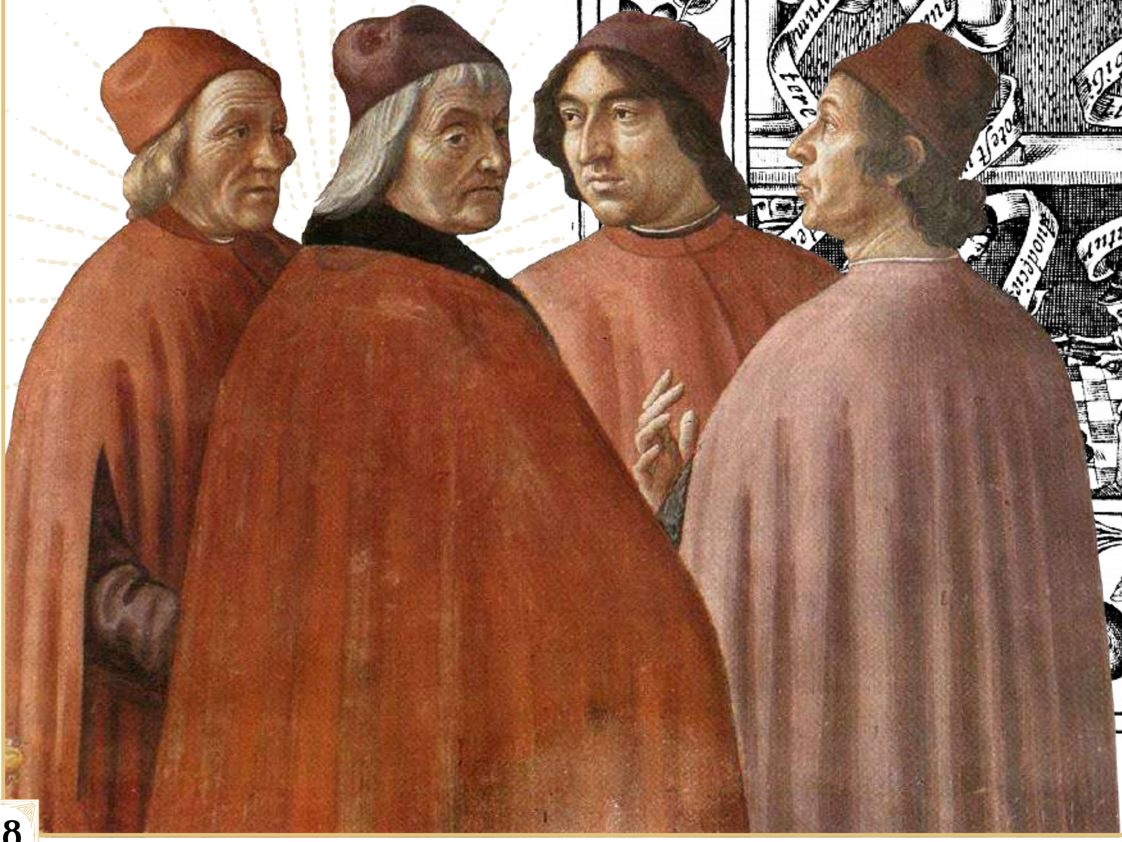
Faustus makes a pact with Mephistopheles, a spirit sent by Satan to do a deal – unlimited power in exchange for Faustus's soul. The philosopher has a whale of a time – until the day comes when the debt has to be paid.

This, however, is far from the rarified atmosphere of the Renaissance scholars studying ancient authors to discover wisdom, for its own sake. Ficino took what was considered to be a major step forward when he translated into Latin a

The British Museum holds several artefacts once owned by John Dee, including an amulet and crystal globe



The four great alchemists. From left to right: Al-Jabir, Arnold of Villanova, Rhazes and Hermes Trismegistus look down on workers in a laboratory

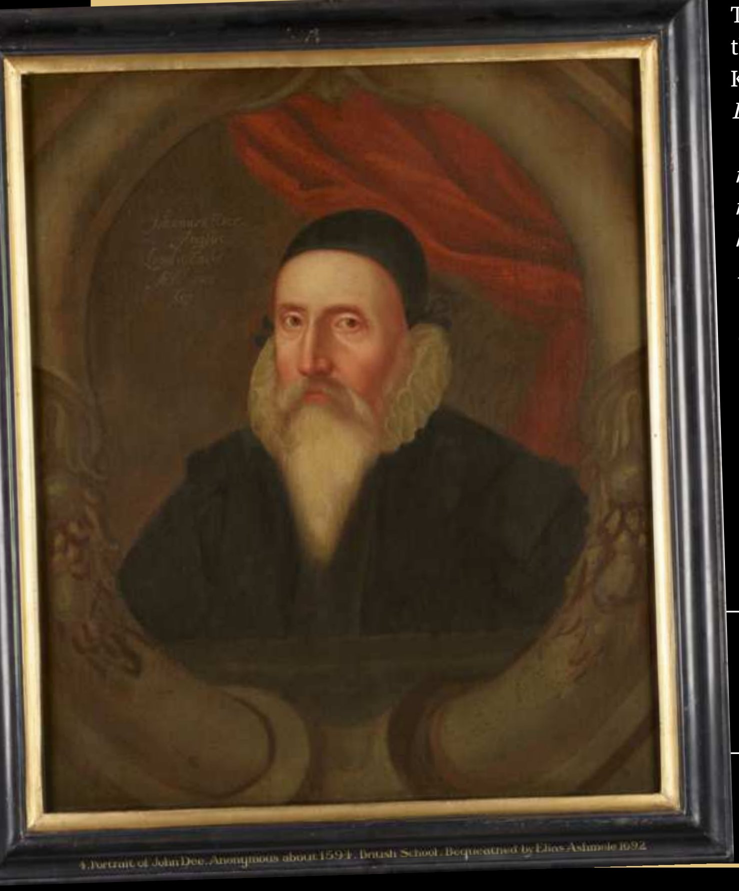


Marsilio Ficino (first on left) from a fresco painted by Domenico Ghirlandaio

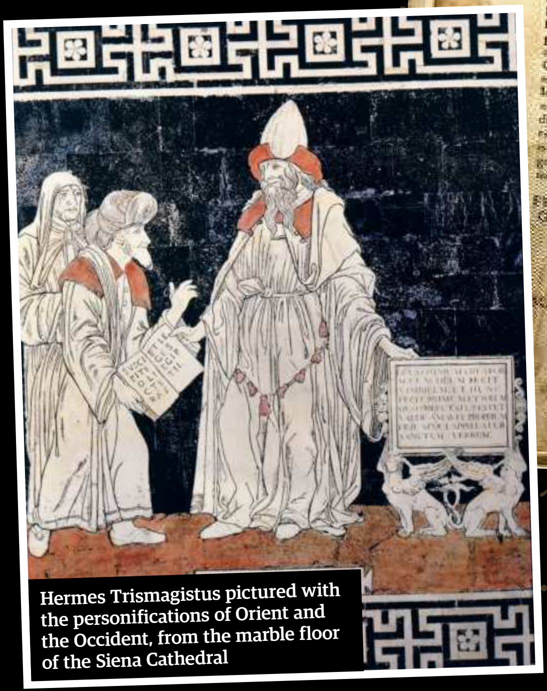
England's most famous magus

The extraordinary life of John Dee (1527-1608/9) provides us with a vivid example of how science, philosophy and magic interacted in many Renaissance thinkers. He was one of the most brilliant students to emerge from Cambridge University. Though his studies embraced many subjects, his main interest was mathematics. For him the 'magic' of numbers provided an insight into the mind of God. He applied his skills to cartography and the provision of navigational aids for mariners. From here it was but a short step to promoting England's overseas expansion during the reign of Elizabeth I. But he also studied hermetic philosophy, astrology and alchemy. He enjoyed the patronage of the queen, for whom he cast horoscopes. Increasingly his mind turned towards the conjuration of spirits in which he was assisted by the charlatan, Edward Kelly, who cashed in on Dee's fame for his own ends. Together the two men travelled to several European courts in the 1580s seeking new patrons with their promises of providing the guidance of the spirits and the secret of turning base metals into gold. By the time Dee returned to England, having broken his relationship with Kelly, he discovered that public opinion had turned against his dabbling with 'Satanic' magic and that his laboratory had been trashed by angry neighbours. He never regained his earlier fame and eventually died in comparative poverty.

Many of Dee's prized books and instruments were stolen while he travelled Europe


4. Portrait of John Dee. Anonymous about 1594. British School. Bequeathed by Elias Ashmole 1692

Corpus Hermeticum first Latin edition by Marsilio Ficino, 1471 CE


Hermes Trismagistus pictured with the personifications of Orient and the Occident, from the marble floor of the Siena Cathedral

body of writings brought from Constantinople, which he entitled the *Corpus Hermeticum*. This long-lost text purported to be a classical Greek collection of Greco-Egyptian wisdom dating back even further - perhaps 9,000 years - and taught by Hermes Trismagistus - 'Thrice Great Hermes'. This figure was a god, worshipped by Egyptians as Thoth and by Greeks as Hermes. His teaching was supposedly relayed in various strands. He featured in Zoroastrian worship. He appeared in the Quran as a prophet. Jewish writings mentioned him as a contemporary of Moses. It is easy to see why his Renaissance rediscoverers should have associated him with the prisca theologia. The Hermetic writings were mystical and complex. They could scarcely be otherwise, since they claimed to explain everything. Keith Thomas, in *Religion and the Decline of Magic* offered this summary:

"It taught that by mystical regeneration it was possible for man to regain dominion over nature which he had lost at the Fall [in the Garden of Eden]. Its astrological and alchemical lore helped to create an intellectual environment sympathetic to every kind of mystical and magical activity."

It was all incredibly mysterious and impressive and compelling. The only problem was that the *Corpus Hermeticum* was a fraud. That is to say that, while elements of it went back to classical times, the compendium was written no earlier than 300 CE. This was demonstrated in 1614 by Genevan scholar, Isaac Casaubon, regarded by many contemporaries as the most brilliant Greek scholar of the age.

Away from the rarified atmosphere of philosophical debate, ordinary mortals needed help in coping with the problems of everyday existence. For most people life was, by modern European standards, short and uncomfortable. Average life expectancy was about 35. Most people dwelt in what we would think of as slum conditions. Disease was rife. For example, Renaissance Europe had not yet fully recovered from the Black Death, which had run amok in the mid-14th century and wiped out between a third and a half of the population. Poverty was rife and many families lived a precarious existence on the subsistence level. They needed all the help they could get for their own wellbeing and that of their animals and their crops. No less than the magi, untutored folk believed that the material world was suffused with the spiritual and when they were in need they turned to the 'experts' in their midst who could invoke the aid of higher powers. There were two sources of supernatural power. One was accessed via the Church. The other was available from the practitioners of folk religion.

The most regular 'magic' practised by parish priests was the mass, a service during which the officiant took bread and wine, consecrated them and, by so doing, 'transubstantiated' them into the actual body and blood of Christ. This 'priestly miracle' was the focus of religious life, and masses were performed constantly. For many people the mass elements themselves came to be regarded as possessing holy power. Some worshippers were known to take the consecrated bread away from church, instead of eating it, to use as a charm. The

"The mass elements themselves came to be regarded as possessing holy power"

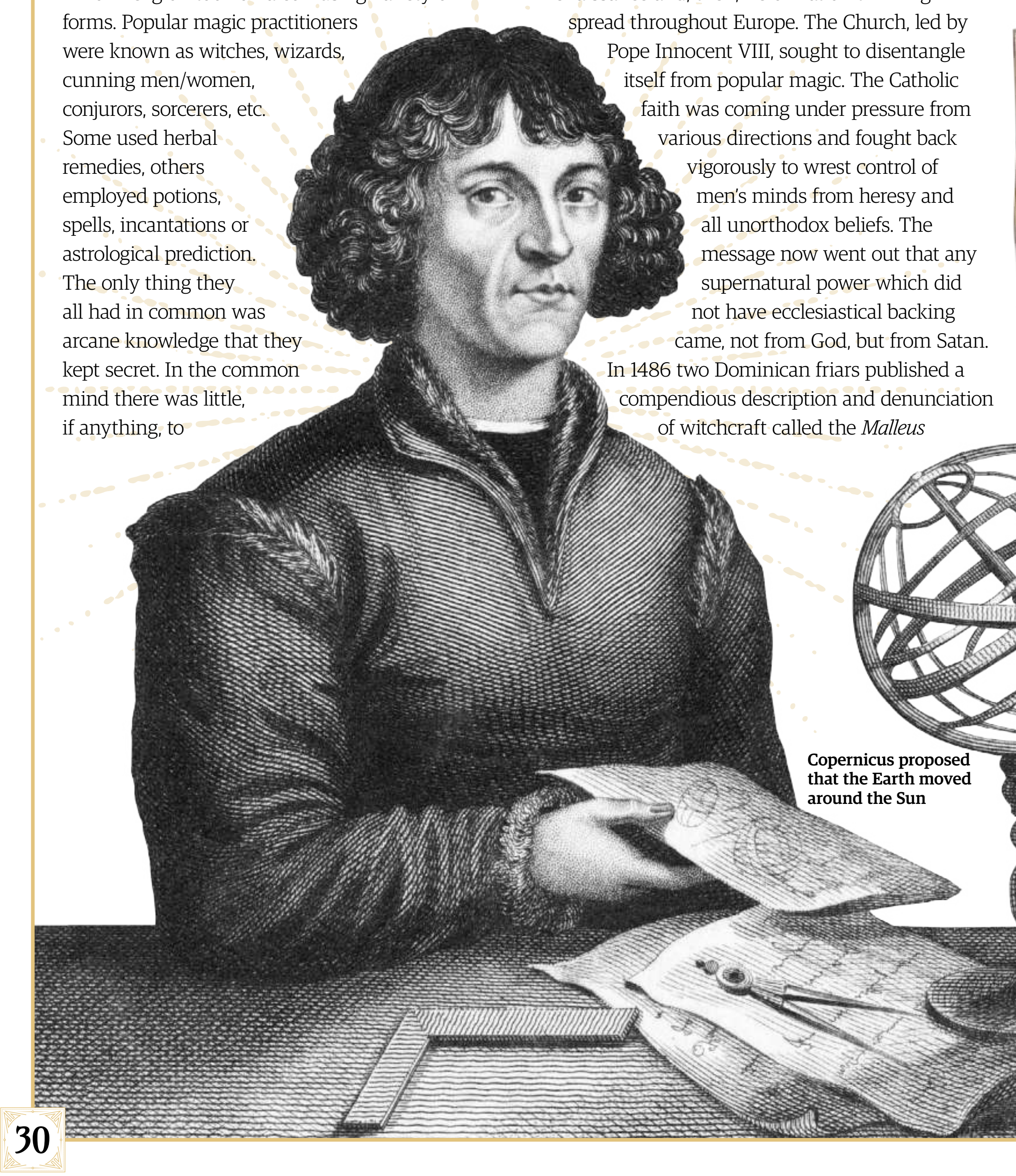
Church disapproved of this but, at the same time, they encouraged this materialistic approach by sponsoring the veneration of holy 'relics'. Items supposedly associated with Christ or the saints were displayed in shrines so that pilgrims could look at, touch or kiss the cases of such relics as 'a finger of St Peter', or 'a fragment of wood from the true Cross'. One of the first books published by the pioneer English printer, William Caxton, was a translation of *The Golden Legend* (1483), an earlier collection of stories describing miracles wrought by saints or their relics. It recorded how a whole city was miraculously preserved by the cloth spread over the tomb of the local martyr, St. Agatha. A year after her death the mountain that looms over Catania erupted and spewed a river of fire and molten rock down towards the city. Then crowds of pagans fled from the mountain to the saint's tomb, snatched up the pall that covered it and hung it up in the path of the fire and... the stream of lava halted and did not advance a foot farther.

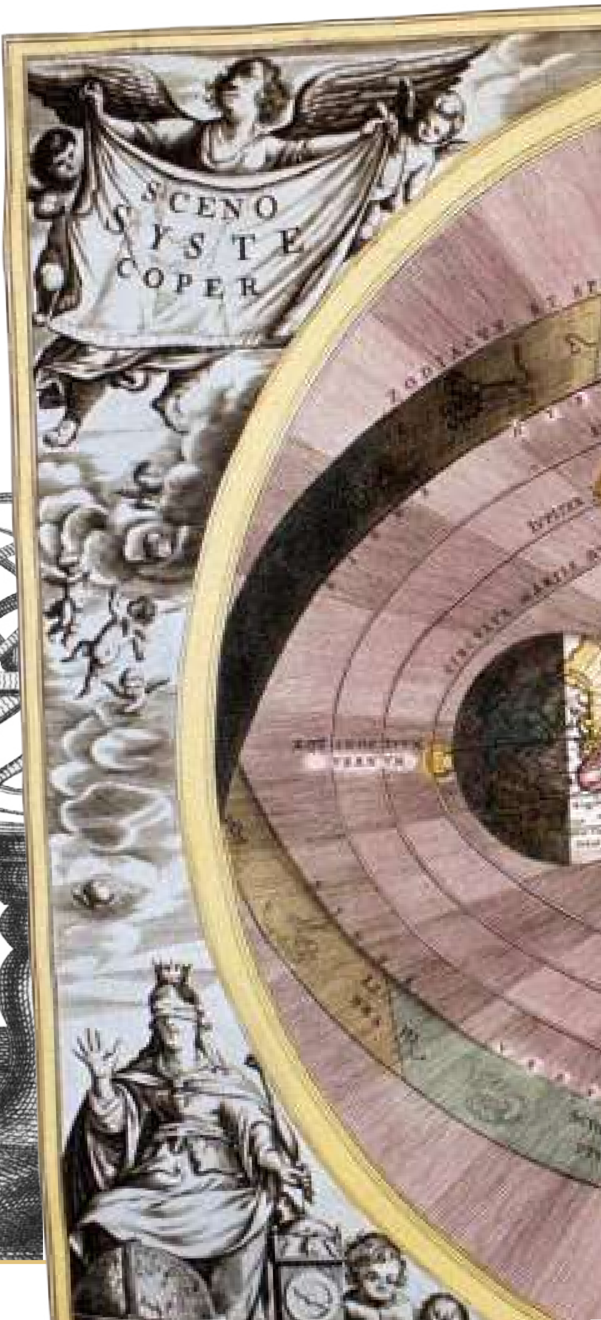
Folk religion took on a confusing variety of forms. Popular magic practitioners were known as witches, wizards, cunning men/women, conjurors, sorcerers, etc. Some used herbal remedies, others employed potions, spells, incantations or astrological prediction. The only thing they all had in common was arcane knowledge that they kept secret. In the common mind there was little, if anything, to distinguish between Church magic and traditional folk remedies. If your child was sick, or your crops spoiled; if you were lovesick or angry with your neighbour; if you wanted to know how a business venture would turn out or were desperately in need of a son to inherit your property, there were a variety of specialists at your disposal. The help you received might contain both religious and naturalistic elements - such as visiting a specific shrine and there repeating mystic incantations. In the 1550s, a Somerset cunning woman, Joan Tyrry, prescribed herbs for treating a bewitched person but insisted that they should be gathered while reciting five Paternosters, five Ave Marias and a Creed.

> Legend has it that Copernicus was presented with the final printed pages of his book on the very day that he died

But things were changing drastically as Renaissance and, then, Reformation thinking spread throughout Europe. The Church, led by Pope Innocent VIII, sought to disentangle itself from popular magic. The Catholic faith was coming under pressure from various directions and fought back vigorously to wrest control of men's minds from heresy and all unorthodox beliefs. The message now went out that any supernatural power which did not have ecclesiastical backing came, not from God, but from Satan. In 1486 two Dominican friars published a compendious description and denunciation of witchcraft called the *Malleus Maleficarum*. This notorious book asserted that all practitioners of folk religion had sold their souls and laid down rules for interrogation, conviction and punishment of suspects. In fact, it did not become the weapon in the persecutors' armoury for another century. Its importance lies in what it reveals about the intellectual climate of the time.

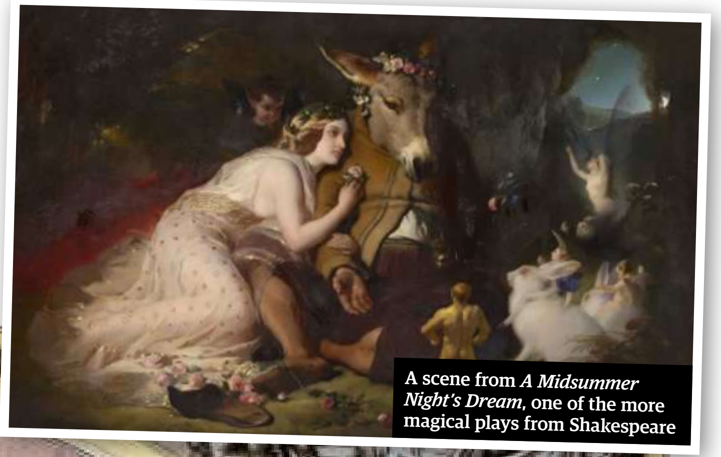
A rising tide of scepticism in Europe was threatening to seep into the foundations of the medieval Church and weaken it. People questioned the power of the priesthood and the moral standards of its representatives. Renaissance thinkers like Ficino did not cease to be devout Catholics, but their speculations about the history of Christianity and its connection with Islamic and Jewish thought challenged official teaching. At the grassroots the spread of literacy and the reading

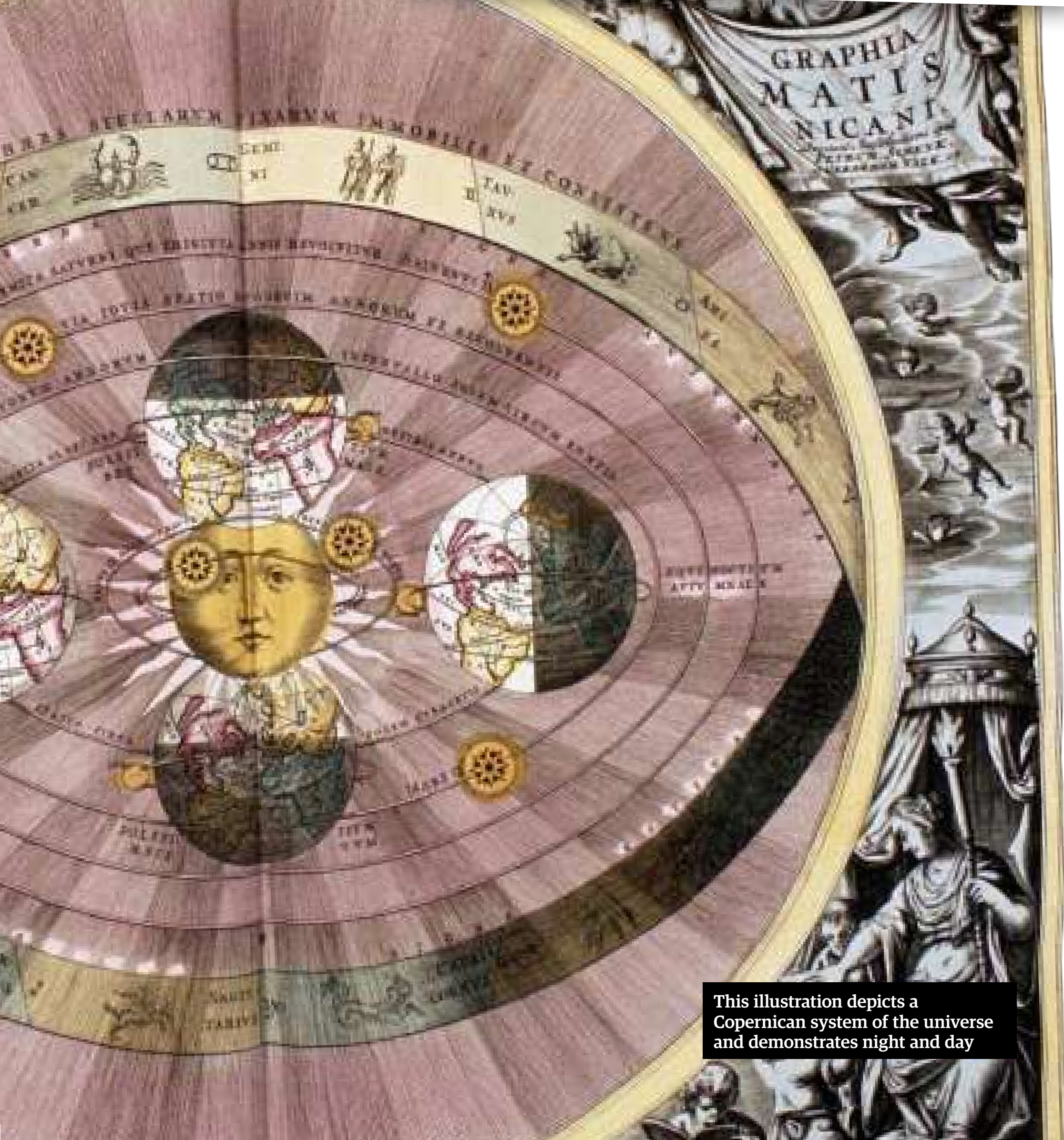

Copernicus proposed that the Earth moved around the Sun



of vernacular Bibles encouraged ordinary people to think for themselves. The emphasis moved away from the performance of rituals and the veneration of holy 'things' to reflection on ideas and the embracing of personal theological beliefs. The Renaissance also presented challenging theories in the realm of science. Nicholas Copernicus, for example, produced evidence for the belief that the Earth moved round the Sun, and not vice-versa. Then in 1517, the German monk, Martin Luther, went for the papal jugular by declaring that the pope did not have power to forgive sins. This outrageous claim, backed up by proofs from the Bible, struck such a chord with so many people that it triggered the Reformation. Some zealots attacked shrines and images that represented the old religion.

Instead of cautiously welcoming the new thinking and engaging in debate with the exponents of radical ideas and beliefs, many Church leaders dug their heels in, determined to protect Catholic tradition at all cost. They banned books that challenged official teaching. They branded all critics as heretics, demanded that they repented of their errors and they punished them if they refused. Ironically, some of the Church's fiercest critics, who would eventually be known as Protestants, actually agreed with Rome's condemnation of magic as diabolical and, in the 17th century, became some of the most ardent persecutors of witches and their ilk.

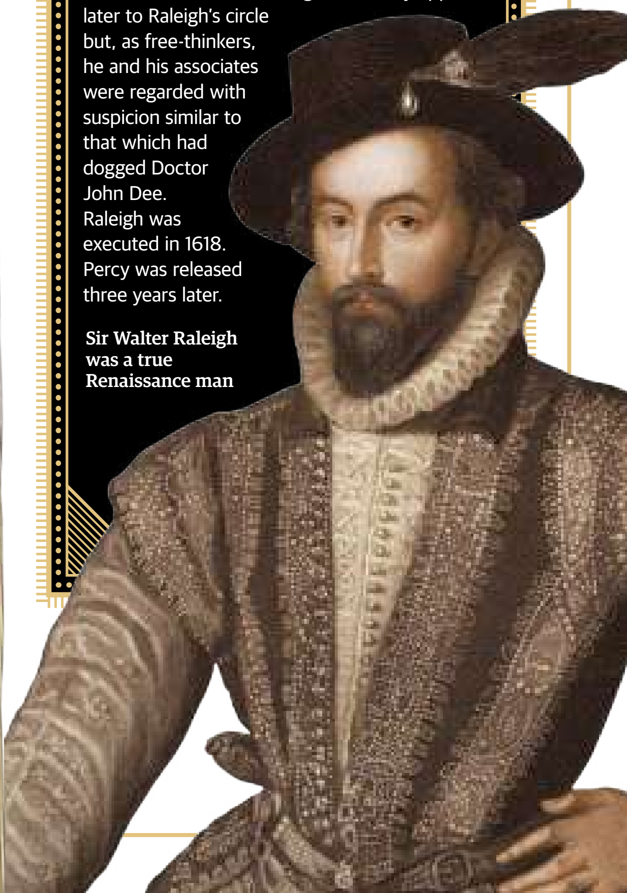

A scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, one of the more magical plays from Shakespeare



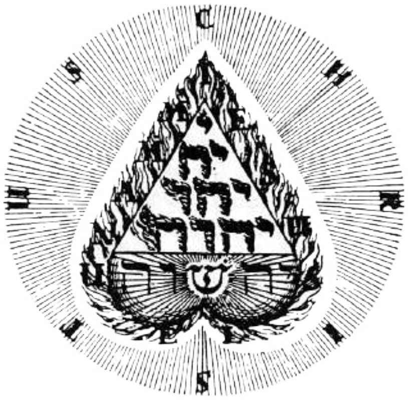
This illustration depicts a Copernican system of the universe and demonstrates night and day

The School of Night

One of the strangest 'academies' where amateur scholars dabbled in arcane knowledge and were widely suspected of magical practices was held in a prison – and not any prison. This intellectual salon met in the Tower of London. Soon after the accession of James I in 1603, Queen Elizabeth's favourite, Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618), was arrested on suspicion of being involved in a plot against the new king. Though found guilty, his life was spared and he was lodged in the Tower. Two years later, Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland (1564-1632) was accused of complicity in the Gunpowder Plot and suffered the same fate. The conditions of their imprisonment were far from harsh. They had spacious quarters, kept servants and received visitors. They also devoted themselves to the study of philosophy, theology and astrology, being joined by scholars such as Thomas Harriot (1560-1621), the inventor of navigational instruments and an astronomical telescope. Raleigh wrote *A History of the World*, Percy amassed a large library and equipped a laboratory for carrying out alchemical experiments. All this, plus the personal reputations of the two men and the enmity of King James (who was paranoid about witchcraft) was enough to engender Faustian suspicions of probing forbidden knowledge. They were accused of atheism (in those days only scarcely less reprehensible than treason) and Percy was widely known as the 'Wizard Earl'. The term the 'School of Night' was only applied later to Raleigh's circle but, as free-thinkers, he and his associates were regarded with suspicion similar to that which had dogged Doctor John Dee. Raleigh was executed in 1618. Percy was released three years later.


Sir Walter Raleigh was a true Renaissance man

© Alamy, Getty Images



Kabbalah

Drawing upon Judaism, Kabbalah is a mystical tradition that centres on receiving knowledge of God and guidance for everyday living

Written by David Crookes

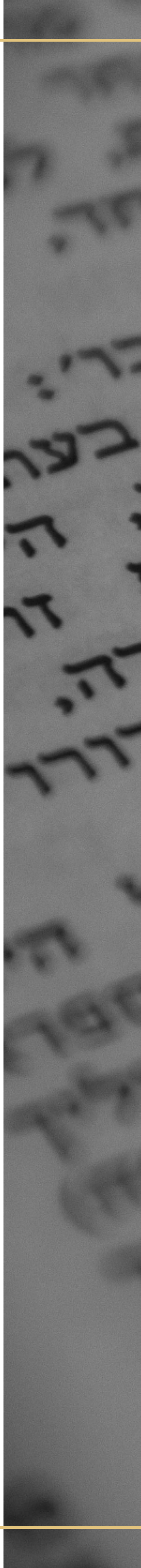
Think of the mystical religion Kabbalah, and many will immediately picture the singer Madonna. As one of a number of celebrities to embrace its ancient wisdom in recent years, she has sought to study and understand Kabbalah's deep teachings, often in the face of great criticism. Through her efforts, people have learned of some aspects of the religion, not least the strand of red-string bracelet that many contemporary followers wear to ward off the evil eye.

But Kabbalah is no celebrity fad, nor is it by any means a newfangled religion. It's the theology of the Jewish people and the spiritual study of unseen laws governing the universe from the perspective of Judaism. Those who follow it have done so because they believe it gives them a great understanding into the workings and the structure of the human soul. Indeed, its origins are said to stretch back to the Holy Scriptures, to Adam, the first man.

According to Kabbalistic tradition, Adam was both the spiritual and biological ancestor of humans and he was also androgynous. He was split into two halves after eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil but then received his teachings for mankind through the Archangel Raziel, the Keeper of Secrets. Kabbalists believe man and woman must merge in marriage to form a full soul. More than that, tradition teaches the souls of all humans combine to form one soul, which is that of Adam.

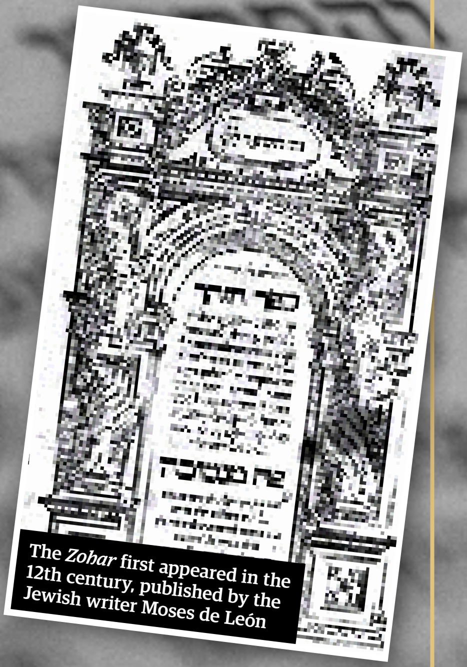
Abraham also figures highly in Kabbalah, as he does in Judaism as a whole (he is seen as the founding father of the Covenant). Traditional Kabbalists believe Abraham, who lived around 1,700 BCE, received the truth of Kabbalah and wrote the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the earliest extant book on Jewish esotericism and the first Kabbalistic text. For that reason, it has become a primary source for students of Kabbalah and it also reinforces Abraham's view that God is One.

Such beliefs were cemented by the prophet and teacher Moses who ascended Mount Sinai and received the Commandments from God along with the Oral Torah. The latter contained the laws, statutes and legal interpretations that had not been noted in the Written Torah (the Five Books of Moses) and the Kabbalistic truths they contained paved a spiritual level of existence that explored the nature of the soul. Bodies were seen



Even though Kabbalists say that humankind's greatest pleasure is to know God, their view is that knowledge of God is impossible

This a fragment of the *Zohar*, a collection of commentaries on the Torah which forms a primary book for Kabbalists



The *Zohar* first appeared in the 12th century, published by the Jewish writer Moses de León

"Kabbalah is the spiritual study of unseen laws governing the universe" as temporary; souls ever-lasting. Fundamentally, Kabbalah became a way for Judaism to understand God and receive his knowledge.

To that end, Jews sought to pass down their knowledge through the generations, even though they had suffered from oppression throughout the Roman Empire. From about 100 BCE to 1000 CE, for instance, Merkabah mysticism had emerged as a school of early Jewish mysticism and the mystics focused on the Book of Ezekiel in the Hebrew Bible. The first chapter centred on prophet Ezekiel's vision of riding to the heavens in a divine chariot. Mystics sought to interpret the meaning of the vision and what it said and revealed about God.

The idea manifested itself in a study called ma'aseh merkabah which taught that the path to God was strewn with obstacles and encouraged Jews to train their minds in order to connect on an emotional as well as physical level. Meanwhile, ma'aseh bereshit emerged as a mystical understanding of verses in the book of Genesis. It interpreted the first chapter as a dichotomy of upper and lower worlds split between God and humans. Kabbalah grew from both studies as followers sought to question and probe more deeply, to look beyond the surface of whatever was presented to them.

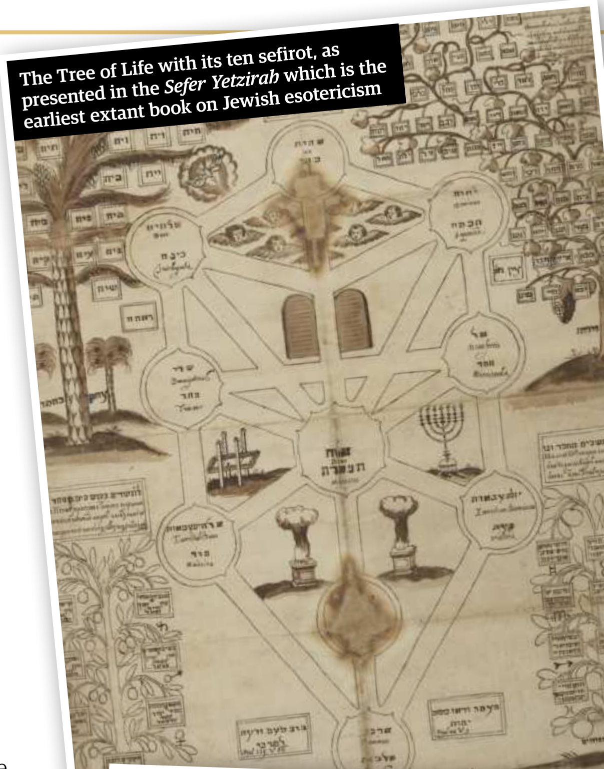
> Kabbalists say that God is constantly creating the world through ten fundamental forces called the sefirot

Kabbalah, however, did not reach maturity until the 13th century and it was from this point on that the ideas truly spread, thanks to its switch from an oral tradition to one that was written. The most famous work of Kabbalah, the *Zohar*, emerged. Written in Aramaic, it was revealed by the Spanish Kabbalist Moses de León who claimed it was the work of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, a Jewish writer who lived in the second century. As with the Talmud - the texts of which included the ma'aseh merkabah and ma'eseh bereshit - it ended up standing alongside both the Talmud and the Torah as important pillars of the wisdom writing of the Children of Israel in Kabbalah tradition.

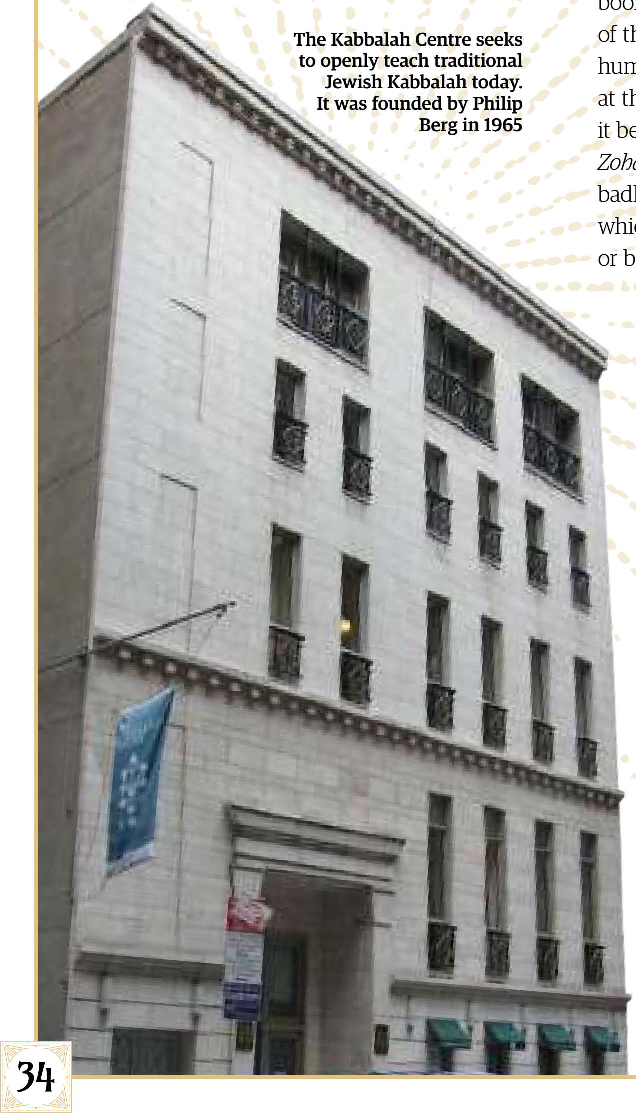
But what was it? The *Zohar* was a series of books that commented on the mystical aspects of the Torah, exploring the nature of God and the human soul as well as good, evil and sin. It looked at the structure of the universe and its origins and it became vitally important for students. The *Zohar* was also greatly significant for the Jews badly affected by the Alhambra Decree of 1492, which saw them forced to convert to Christianity or be expelled from the Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon on the orders of the joint Catholic monarchs of Spain.

Such was Kabbalah's intensity, however, that those seeking to understand had to be aged over 40 (this is due to the first major written collection of the Oral Torah, the Mishnah, speaking of 40 as being the best age for understanding [Ethics of the Fathers 5:24]). It was also preferable for students to be married, which again was seen as a sign of maturity and experience. There was a debate, too, over who actually wrote the *Zohar* with academics since claiming it to be the work of Rabbi Moses de León. Regardless, Judaism became a more inner experience for many.

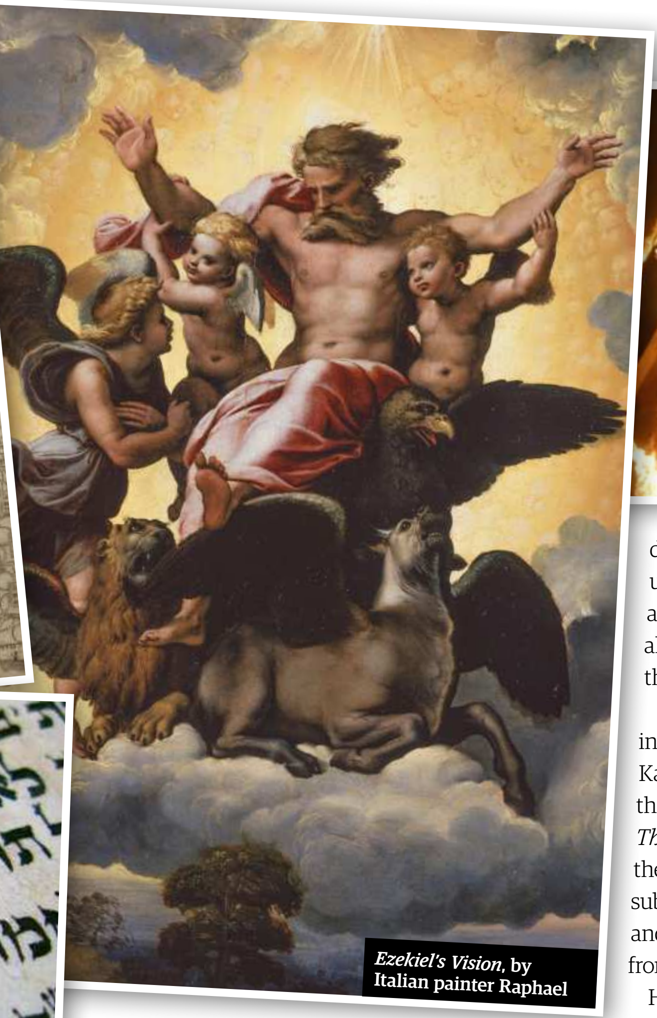
Much of that was down to Jewish mystic Rabbi Isaac Luria who transformed the study before his death in 1572. Key to his interpretation was tzimtzum, the understanding that only God existed before the creation and that 5e began the process


The Tree of Life with its ten sefirot, as presented in the *Sefer Yetzirah* which is the earliest extant book on Jewish esotericism

Jewish Kabbalists read the Torah on four levels, looking at its literal meaning, what it implies, the lessons that can be learned and the secrets it contains


The Kabbalah Centre seeks to openly teach traditional Jewish Kabbalah today. It was founded by Philip Berg in 1965

German occult writer Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa



Ezekiel's Vision, by Italian painter Raphael

An ultra Orthodox Jewish man watches a bonfire during the holiday of Lag B'Omer

of creation by contracting his infinite light to make room for a finite, pluralistic world. This work was passed on thanks to Rabbi Chaim Vital who put the teachings down in writing.

From that emerged the ten sefirot that made up the Kabbalah Tree of Life (that is, the spiritual attributes in which The Infinite God is revealed including primary will, wisdom, understanding, judgement, lovingkindness, might, beauty, glory, victory, connection, sovereignty and the Divine Presence). Such teachings were later adapted by occultist and western esoteric movements, with the Renaissance seeing Christian Kabbalah emerge thanks to a growing appetite for interpreting Christianity from a mystical point of view.

Christian Kabbalah reinterpreted the doctrine of Jewish Kabbalah by linking the atonement and resurrection of Jesus Christ to the ten sefirot. In the Christian Kabbalah's Tree of Life, the three topmost spheres became connected to the Trinity, the rest concerning themselves with Earth. Hermetic Qabalah then arose from a desire to find proof of Christian doctrine in Hebrew mysticism. It not only drew upon Kabbalah but also pagan religions, western astrology, gnosticism, neoplatonism, tantra and alchemy. By combining different beliefs and thoughts, it promoted a syncretic world view.

Although Hermeticists saw Qabalah's origins in classic Greece rather than Jewish mysticism, Kabbalah found its way into Hermetic tradition from the 15th century. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa wrote *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* which explored the beliefs of Western Esotericism. It looked at the subjects of ritual magic, spells, ceremonial procedures and Kabbalah among others and approached them from the perspective of a scholar.

Hermetic Qabalah's emphasis was on the power of a magician to make ever so slight alterations in the higher realm, and the cards that made up Tarot replaced the ten sefirot in the Tree of Life. Orphism and Egyptian mythology were added during the 17th century and its influence grew among non-Jewish scholars. They felt it could uncover hidden connections since they believed anything would take the place of the ten spheres and 22 paths of the Tree of Life. It posits that the universe is best understood by numbers and so draws upon the work of Pythagoras.

Even so, Luria's initial influence continues to this day (and that's quite aside from Madonna writing a song called *Isaac* in 2005 which many believed was about him). The Kabbalah Centre, led by Rabbi Philip Berg is the most influential and it is dedicated to bringing the wisdom of the religion to the world. Jewish Kabbalists continue to believe that they are able to repair the damage between the upper and lower worlds by detaching the divine light connecting good with evil and that, by observing the commandments, it will lead people from exile to redemption.

> Kabbalists believe that our souls will greatly outlive our bodies and that we live in both the physical and spiritual worlds

Syncretism

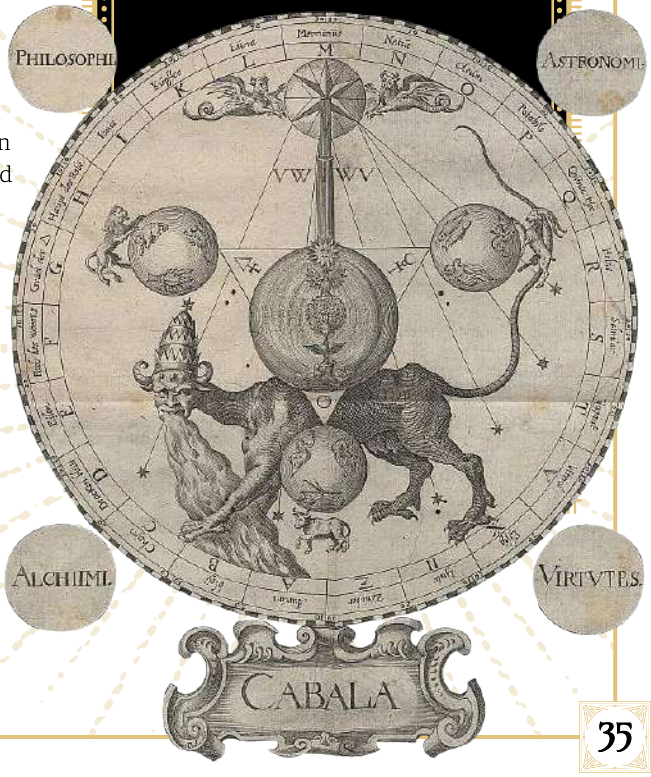
Hermetic Qabalah combined diverse beliefs and blended practices of various schools of thought. In sharing concepts with Jewish Kabbalah and drawing on alchemy, pagan religions, Western astrology, gnosticism and more, it created a new system and was a prime example of what is termed religious syncretism.

Detractors, including Orthodox Christians, say syncretism relies not on the Scriptures but on the whim of humans, drawing on influences affecting a culture. They say it makes a religion illegitimate, but there's a compelling argument that all religions are syncretic to some degree: many pagan symbols, for example, were adopted by Christianity between the second and fourth centuries.

Indeed, the religion of Judaism has also arguably absorbed outside religious influences (Jewish fundamentalists, however, say it has not). Meanwhile, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, an Italian Renaissance nobleman and philosopher, founded the tradition of Christian Kabbalah through a syncretic view of Kabbalah, Hermeticism, Aristotelianism, Platonism and Neoplatonism.

Other syncretistic movements include gnosticism which blends aspects of Oriental mystery religions, the dualistic religion founded in the third century, Manichaeism, and Sikhism which draws on elements of Hinduism and Islam. Aside from religion, it should be noted that syncretism is also common in other expressions of culture, including literature and music.

The 17th-century printmaker Stephan Michelspacher published *Cabala, Spiegel der Kunst und Natur: in Alchymia* in 1615



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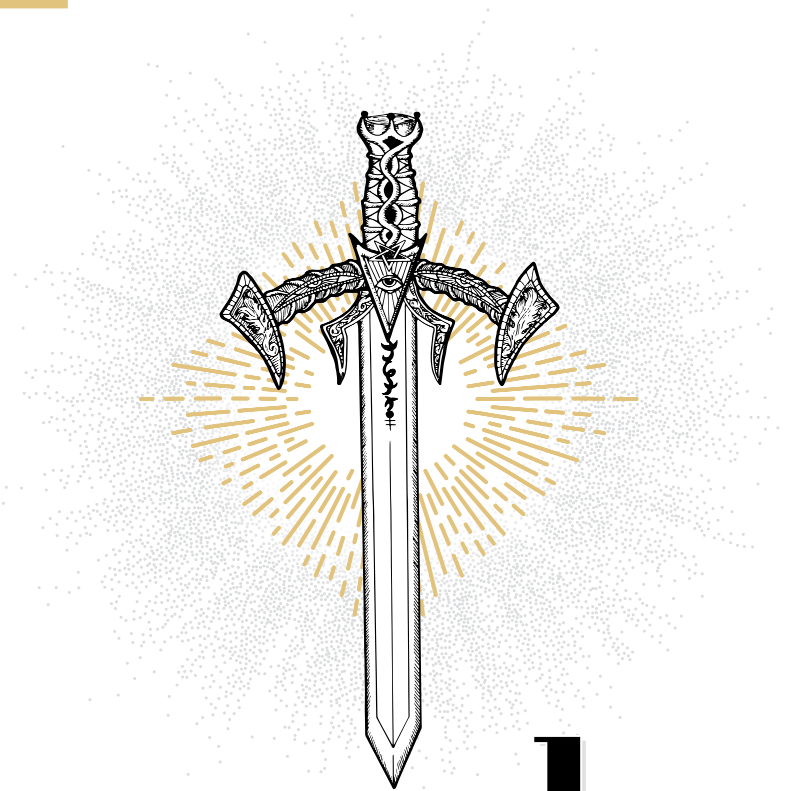


Paracelsus

Dubbed 'the Luther of medicine', pioneering doctor and chemist Paracelsus was a hugely controversial figure in his short lifetime

Written by Martyn Conterio

Every so often, a person is born destined - as if by divine purpose - to change the world. Swiss chemist and occultist Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (1493-1541), who became known across Europe and entered the annals of history as Doctor Paracelsus, was an absolute rock star of medicine. He took medical knowledge kicking and screaming into the Renaissance from the end days of the Middle Ages, all the while annoying just about everybody and making so many enemies he lived with an almost constant threat of physical harm and mortal danger.

Paracelsus was a bridge between the old world and new; a man whose achievements helped pave the way towards modern science as we know it today. Although far-reaching, he was still deeply religious and wished to understand nature through his own prism, which included a deep fascination with religion, alchemy, astrology and magic. Paracelsus firmly believed the mystery of nature was the mystery of God. An occultist, yes, but not the devil worshipper he was accused of being. Yet his prescriptions for ills involved astrological readings and concoctions born of magic, while his distinct hermetical beliefs rejected the doctrine of the Hippocratic system of the four humours. His career was all about understanding what he called 'lumen naturae' - the light of nature (the essence and building block of everything in the universe). From experience and studying nature, Paracelsus thought he could unlock the mysteries of the cosmos. As with many pioneers, he wasn't truly appreciated in his lifetime.

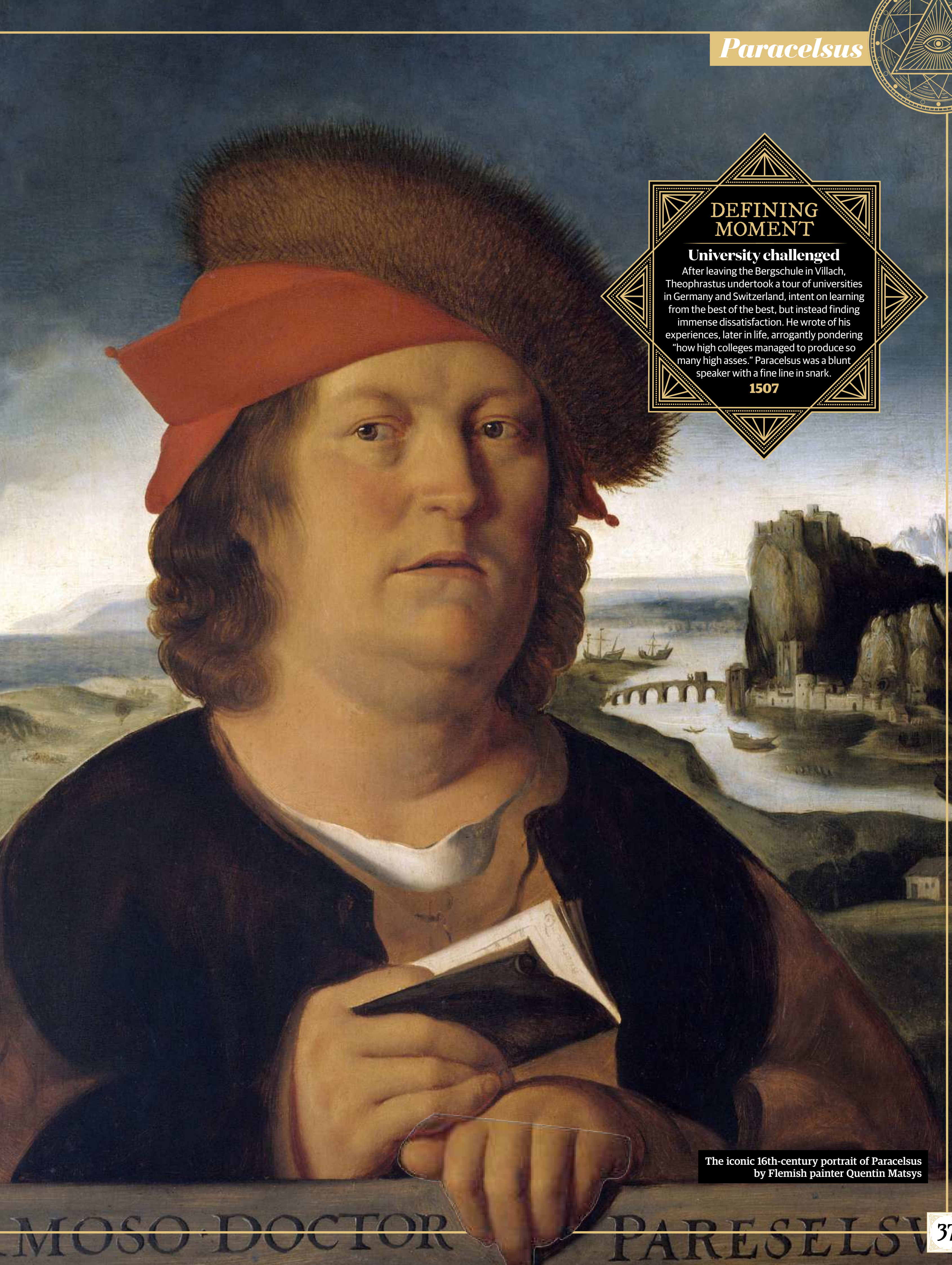
Paracelsus was far ahead of gatekeepers of useless knowledge, who clung to traditions and dusty old books. The fact that physicians left surgery to barber-surgeons appalled Paracelsus beyond words. He was not afraid of gore, entrails and getting his hands bloody. Throughout his career, he banished the idea that physicians

DEFINING MOMENT

University challenged

After leaving the Bergschule in Villach, Theophrastus undertook a tour of universities in Germany and Switzerland, intent on learning from the best of the best, but instead finding immense dissatisfaction. He wrote of his experiences, later in life, arrogantly pondering "how high colleges managed to produce so many high asses." Paracelsus was a blunt speaker with a fine line in snark.

1507


The iconic 16th-century portrait of Paracelsus by Flemish painter Quentin Matsys

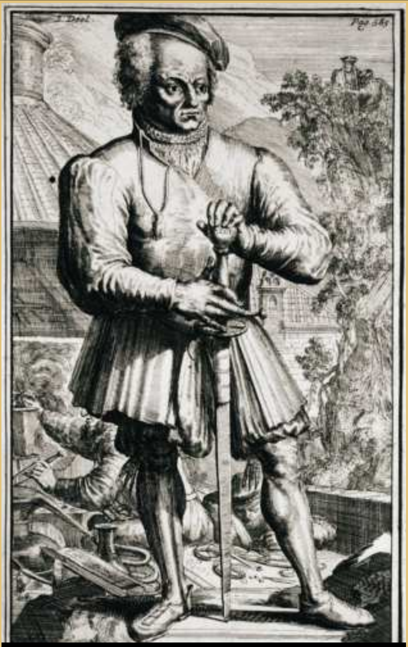
> “I have not been ashamed to learn from tramps, butchers and barbers”

The magic sword

Paracelsus sported a German-style longsword, to which he gave an occult name: Azoth (an alchemical term for a transformational element sort by occultists and magicians, and the name given to mercury). The sword would have been three to four feet long with a cross-guard and globular pommel. Rumour spread that he slept with it by his side and that it had a life of its own – it could dance a jig, clattering about the room making an ungodly clanging racket, waking up Paracelsus's neighbours and leading to his reputation for belligerent and sinister behaviour.

Why a learned man and soctor of medicine should walk around sporting such a cumbersome object on his belt has never been explained, though given his infamous bad temper and reputation for making enemies left, right and centre, he might well have used it for protection. It was fashionable for doctors of the period to wear daggers on their belts, but here Paracelsus upped the ante.

Another story spread about Azoth is directly associated with Paracelsus's occultist reputation. It was said that inside the sword handle he kept his familiar, who would be released from Azoth to procure things for his master, such as gold coins, to pay for a night's sleep at an inn.



Paracelsus and sword, Azoth, illustrated by 17th-century Dutch artist, Romeyn de Hooch

couldn't touch the human body. He came to understand wounds kept clean would heal. Another reason Paracelsus incurred the wrath of traditionalists was his secretive notes, the way he jotted what today we'd call prescriptions or remedies, and his boastfulness that their feeble minds couldn't possibly compete or understand his level of intelligence. His cure for dysentery reads: 'Of Bloodstone, Of Red Corals, Of Spodium, Of Tanacetum, to the weight of all. Make trochisks with mucilage of the glue of botin. The dose is 3ss.' Paracelsus's chief – and lasting – claim to fame in chemistry and medicine is the invention of laudanum, or at least introducing it into European medicine for aiding surgery and recovery. He also devised liniments for the treatments of wounds in battle, having worked extensively in his early years as an army surgeon, along with using the metal mercury in the treatment of syphilis.

Paracelsus was, he felt, on a mission from God, and his constant exasperation with universities, apothecaries and quacks living in the past led to him being branded arrogant, a fool and possibly in league with Satan. Known for a belligerent manner, blunt speaking and egalitarian spirit, he once referred to himself as a “rough man from a rough country”. His lack of social skills, however, was more down to a superiority complex than it was a humble social standing. The son of a chemist with an association to minor nobility, Doctor Paracelsus became interested in alchemy as a child. Alchemists long searched for the secret of turning lead into gold and this intrigued young Theophrastus. Of course, such a thing is impossible, but the exposure to metallurgy and occultist beliefs boasted far-reaching implications for his career and development of chemical therapies for illness (such as using mercury and copper sulphate) as opposed to herbal ones.

DEFINING MOMENT

Burning Books

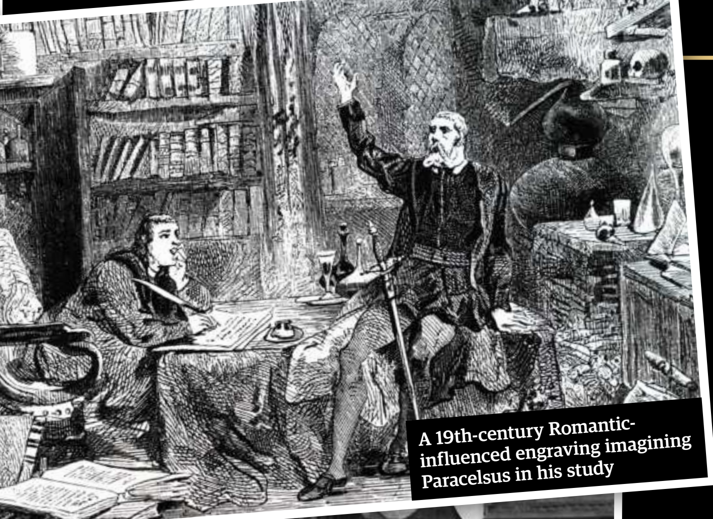
Paracelsus caused a general stink upon his appointment as Doctor of Medicine at University of Basel. He publicly burned the works of Greek physician Galen and Islamic scholar, Ibn Sina. He also aroused suspicions and hostility by giving lectures in German, not Latin, and preferred wearing an alchemist's leather apron to an academic's gown.

24 June 1527

The tomb of Paracelsus, located in St Sebastian church, Salzburg

Opium-based laudanum became popular in the 19th century. Paracelsus is credited with its invention

LAÜD:
LIQ:
SŸD:
LAUDANUM
Syden
Laudanum.--POISON



A 19th-century Romantic-influenced engraving imagining Paracelsus in his study

A Paracelsus biopic was made in Germany, during the days of the Third Reich (1943)

Consumed by his work, he lived for chemistry and the study of disease, with no time for social niceties and courtesies. Paracelsus was so full of self-confidence, he thought nothing of screaming and shouting at aristocrats and royalty, especially when they fobbed him off without payment after treatment, thinking he was a diabolical mage rather than a pioneering medicine man. Paracelsus was by all accounts a grump, a grouch, and a man with zero interest in women. His life's desire was to break through the walls of convention and learning. While crusty dullards and dolts ignored evidence and advancements, Paracelsus relied on his rich life experiences and time spent abroad, as well as years as an army surgeon. He was more than willing to talk with vagrants as he was with fellow travellers in the field of alchemy. He made no distinction between classes, so long as he was gleaning valuable information from people. "I have not been ashamed to learn from tramps, butchers and barbers," he once wrote. His willingness to hang out with the lower born led authorities in Salzburg into throwing him out of the city, as they believed he was conspiring with - and encouraging - peasants to revolt.

DEFINING MOMENT

A mysterious end

Having moved to Salzburg under the auspices of Duke Ernst of Bavaria, Paracelsus fell mysteriously ill in the late summer of 1541 and died on 24 September at the White Horse Inn, having gathered the city's public notary and six witnesses on 21 September to read his will and testament. He gave instructions to be buried at Saint Sebastian's church.

24 Sept 1541

After picking up his doctorate from the University of Ferrara, Italy, Theophrastus embarked on a great peregrination. Parts of his travels entered conjecture, legend and myth, with some writers taking him as far as Arabia and Egypt. Others wrote how Paracelsus picked up arcane and esoteric knowledge from the Iberian peninsula (though this chronology is disputed). What isn't disputed is that during this period, Theophrastus began to develop an intense loathing and dissatisfaction with thinkers of the time. "Because you are ignorant of Alchemy, you are ignorant of Nature: and because you are ignorant of Nature, you are ignorant of the Healing Art," he opined.

In 1526-27 Paracelsus returned to Basel, where he became the town physician and occasional lecturer at the university. His time at Basel was contentious, full of outrage, provocations against those he despised (namely professors and other doctors not on his wavelength) and cemented his status as medicine's number one agent provocateur. As part of his eagerness to learn, one of the first things Paracelsus did was put up a notice in town declaring all were welcome at his lectures. He gave them in German, not in the standard Latin, breaking with the elitist orthodoxy of the period. In one notorious incident, he advertised a talk on the elixir of life (an alchemist's obsession) and would reveal - he declared - the source of all creation. An uproar occurred when he began to discuss the chemical processes in the putrefaction process (using dung) to show how excrement can birth life.

His use of chemistry, and ascribing chemical processes to the wonders of the body, shocked students and other professors to the core. Yet people flocked from all corners of Europe to hear Paracelsus speak.

Having been sent packing from Basel due to constant uproars over his teachings and occult activities, Theophrastus wandered once more, settling down here and there, working as a physician by day and experimenting and writing by night (including *The Great Surgery Book*, 1536, and a pioneering treatise on illnesses and diseases suffered by miners).

In his lifetime, Paracelsus was as mocked and ridiculed as he was celebrated. The name 'Paracelsus' was probably given to him by others - maybe his students and admirers - and he never used it in writing (his extant works show this). Paracelsus references the 1st century Roman physician, Celsus, with the added 'para' - meaning beyond - demonstrating his superiority. There is also the theory the name was coined by one of Theophrastus' enemies. It didn't work, as Paracelsus had such a ring to it, any negative association was dissipated in the years after, when a small cult developed around his teachings in the 17th century.

PARACELSUS

A memorial statue to Paracelsus in Salzburg, Austria, where he lived and worked for a time

© Getty Images

Astrology

The history of divining by the movement of the stars and planets goes far beyond the horoscope page at the back of the newspaper…

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

Astrology, or the study of the movements of celestial objects as means for predicting human affairs, is easily the most widely used of all the divinatory arts. With garish horoscopes adorning newspapers and ad spaces every day, it's not hard to see why. To many, modern astrology might seem like a load of nonsense, but it has a rich past, with its roots in calendrical systems firmly planted in different cultures all over the world.

Throughout history, and in many cultures, astrology has been widely trusted as a divining method. It was extremely common in academic circles, almost indistinguishable from astronomy and used in alchemy, meteorology and medicine. But that changed in the 20th century when people began to doubt its accuracy. It rapidly lost its academic and theoretical standing and is now regarded as a pseudoscience.

For many years, astrology has been making an impact all over the world. One of the first civilisations to track celestial activity as a means of divination was that of the Babylonians, with a record of the astronomical observations of Venus (known as the Venus tablet of Ammisaduqa) being compiled around 1700 BCE. More areas started using similar methods from there, including the rest of Mesopotamia, ancient China, ancient Greece and Hellenistic Egypt. Each version of astrology brought with it new elements and new ways of dissecting the sky.

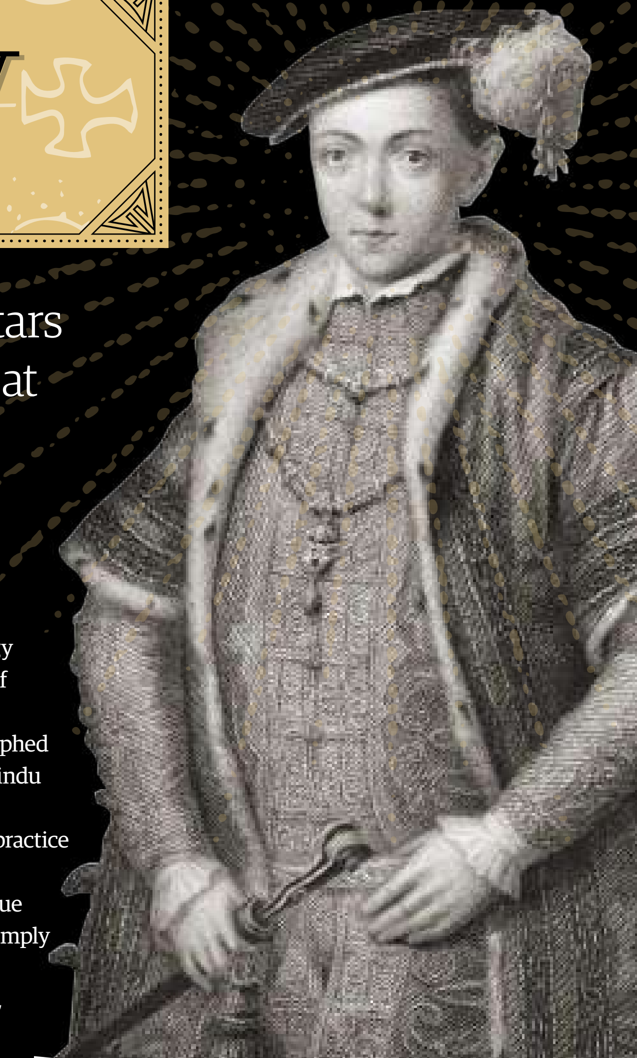
In the medieval world, astrology slowly morphed into something more sophisticated. Islamic, Hindu and European astrology inspired books on the subject. But, as with every divinatory art, the practice inadvertently encouraged objectors, and caused many public figures to argue against it in dissertations, or simply flat-out denounce it.

During the Renaissance, scholars continued to study and practice astrology. Royals like King Edward VI of England and Queen Elizabeth I kept their own personal horoscope writers for predictions.

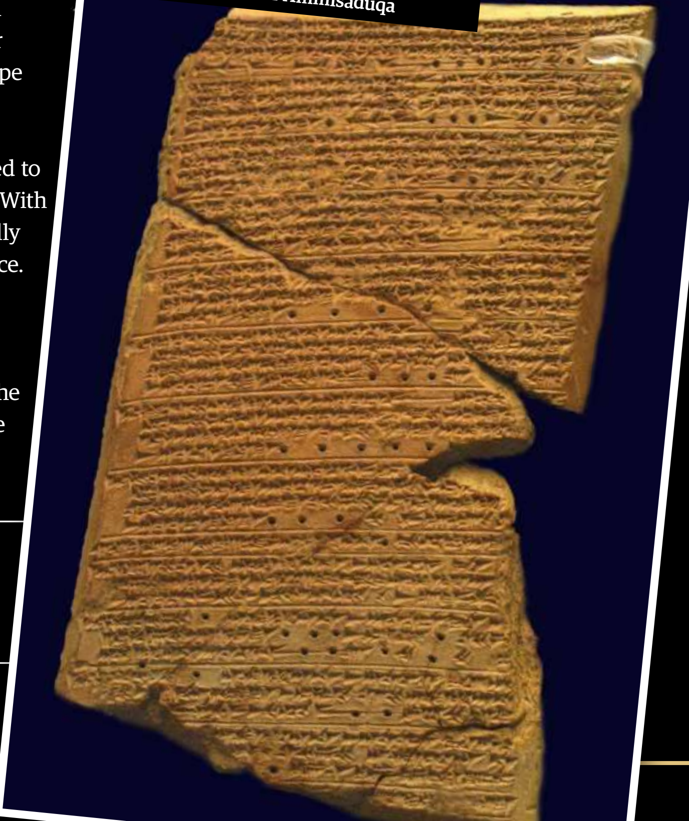
Astrology was so heavily trusted that it would often be used to determined the best time to plant crops. With the Age of Enlightenment, astrology finally lost a lot of its standing as an exact science. Now, it's often viewed as a bit of a laugh. However, recent surveys have revealed that around 25 per cent of Americans, Canadians and Britons still believe that the position of the stars and planets can have an effect on their lives.

> Astrology's use as a divining art has been dated back to the 2nd millennium BCE

> "Royals kept their own personal horoscope writers for predictions"

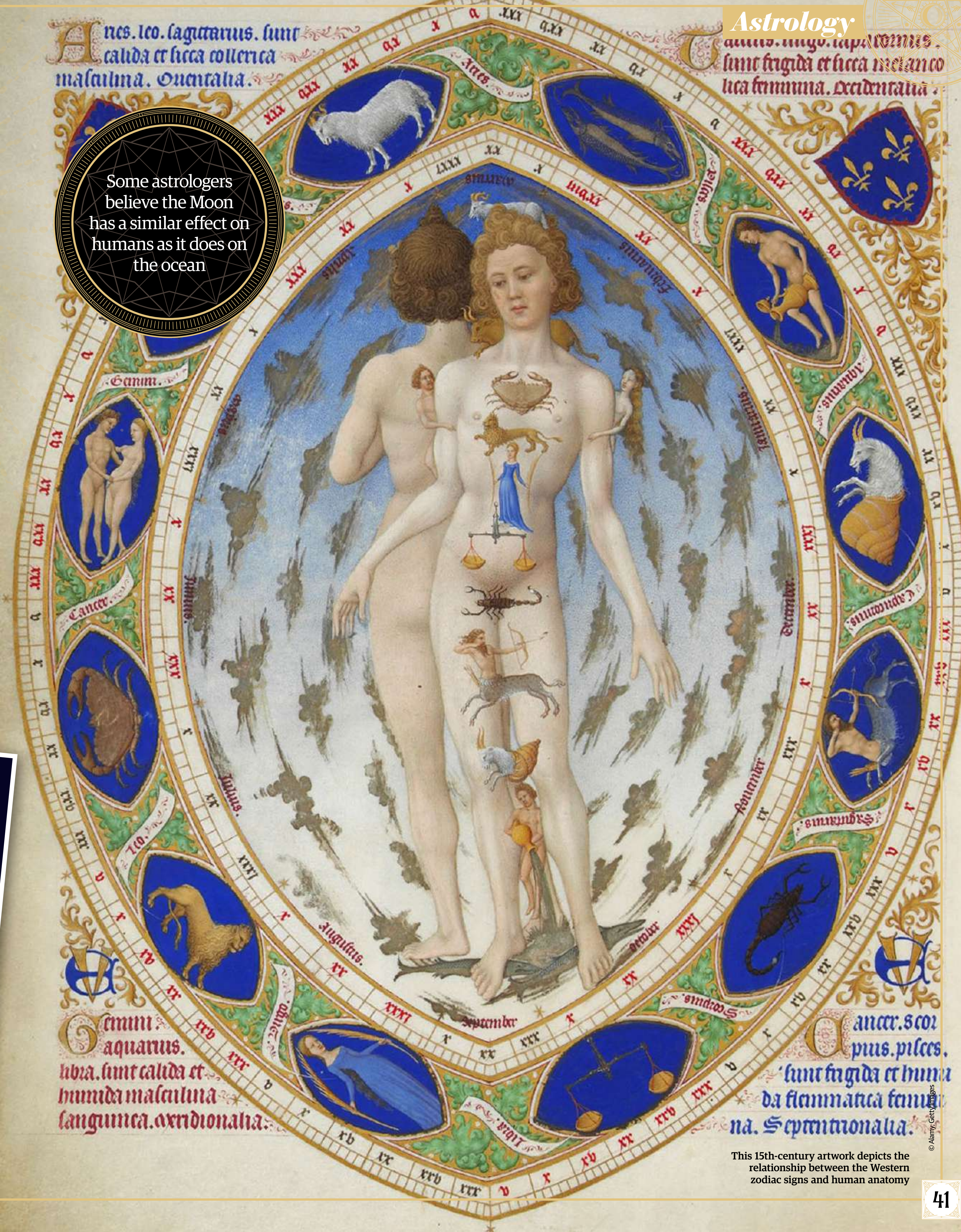


Royals like King Edward VI of England had their own personal horoscope writers on hand



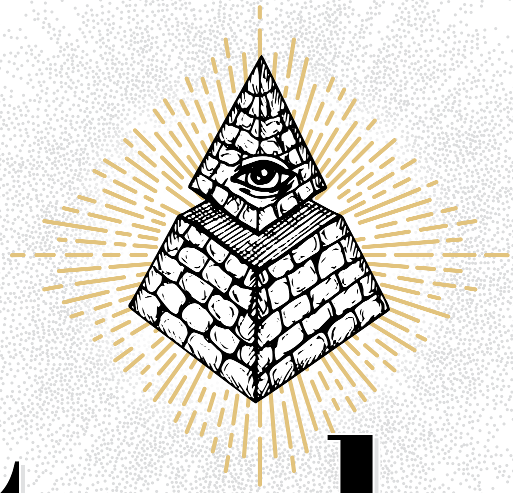
The Babylonians tracked the astronomical observations of Venus with what is known as the Venus tablet of Ammisaduqa

Some astrologers believe the Moon has a similar effect on humans as it does on the ocean


Aries. leo. sagittarius. sunt calida et sicca collerica masculina. Orientalia.
Taurus. virgo. capricornus. sunt frigida et sicca melancolica feminina. Occidentalia.
Geminis. aquarius. libra. sunt calida et humida masculina sanguinea.
Cancer. scorpius. pisces. sunt frigida et humida fleumatica feminina. Septentrionalia.
Aries
Pisces
Aquarius
Capricornus
Sagittarius
Scorpius
Libra
Virgo
Leo
Cancer
Geminis
Januarius
Februarius
Martius
Aprilis
Maius
Junius
Julius
Augustus
September
October
November
December

This 15th-century artwork depicts the relationship between the Western zodiac signs and human anatomy

© Alamy, Getty Images



Nostradamus

One of the most infamous oracles of all time, was Nostradamus a divine prophet or a fraud?

Written by Willow Winsham

Hailed recently as the author of the 'Gospel of Doom for the modern age', Michel de Nostredame - or Nostradamus as he is more commonly known - has had a chequered reputation over the centuries. Born in the French town of Saint-Rémy-de-Provence as 1503 came to a close, Nostradamus was one of at least nine children born to a notary father and a mother from who he could claim a family history in medicine. Little could they have suspected, however, that his name would become synonymous with mayhem and catastrophe both during his lifetime and beyond.

Although the details of his life are often disputed, it is generally assumed that Nostradamus began his professional life at the University of Avignon, although this was brought to an abrupt end in 1521 due to the spread of plague to the city. This opened up new horizons for the young man, and, if reports are to be believed, Nostradamus did not waste the time that followed, spending eight years researching herbal remedies as he roamed the countryside. This stood him in good stead for working as an apothecary, a vocation that he took to keenly for several years, providing cures and tinctures for those who came to him in his self-imposed exile.

In 1529, he decided to try again at the university route, and enrolled to study for a doctorate in medicine at the University of Montpellier. This was also to be short-lived, as he was asked to leave when not only his previous trade as an apothecary was discovered (which was strictly against the rules of the university) but also rumours abounded that he had been speaking out against the medical profession. This lack of formal training did not, however, greatly harm his prospects. In 1531, Nostradamus moved to Agen, married and had two children. Following the death of his wife and children, he continued on with his previous travels. It was during this time that his reputation as a healer of plague was established (although there is little evidence that his attempted cures in either Marseille or his native Salon-de-Provence were successful) before in 1547, he settled once again in his hometown. Here, Nostradamus married for the second and final time, his new wife a widow of wealth who bore him six children during their time together.

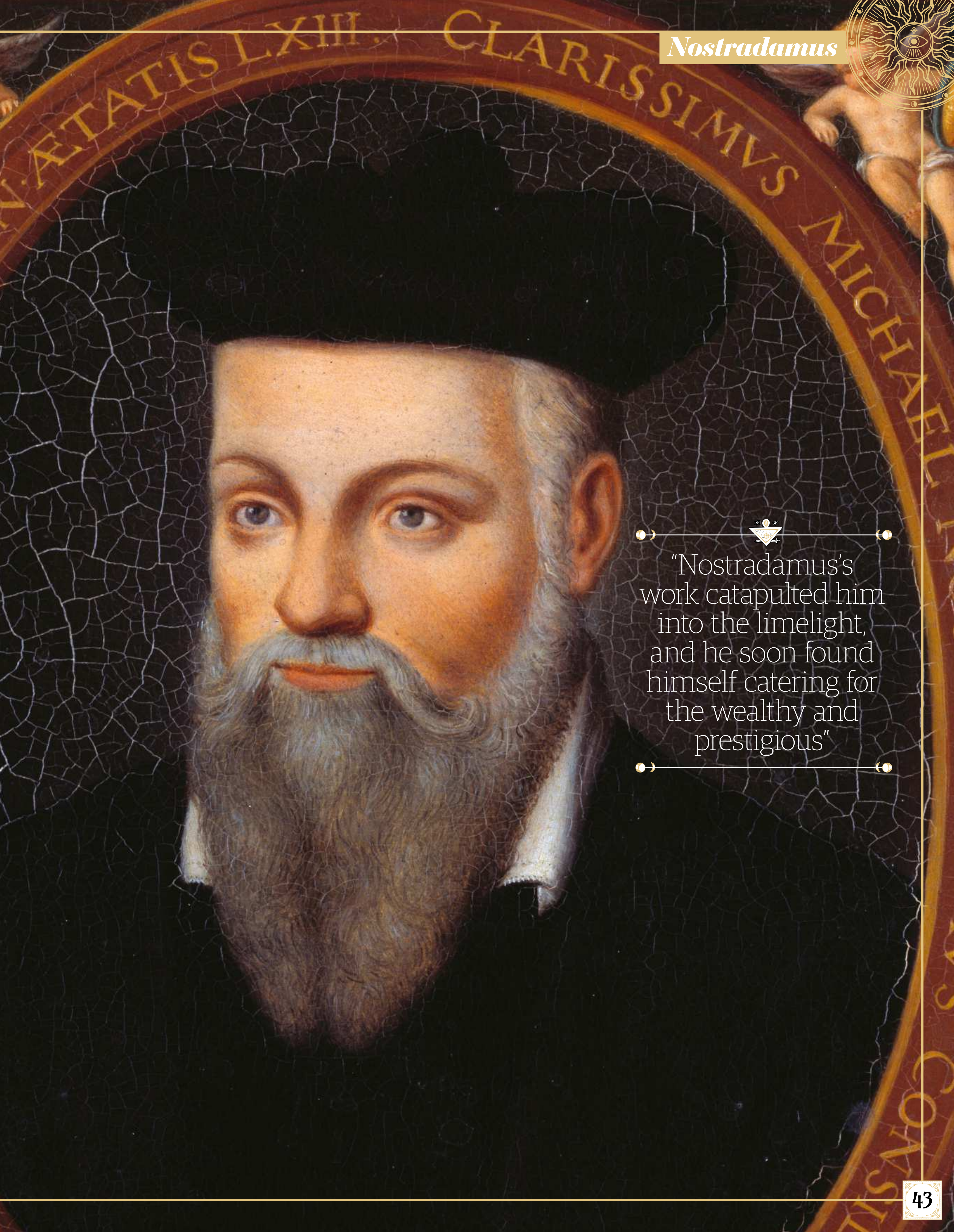
Nostradamus's first official dabbling with the occult and connected subjects came in the mid-1500s, when he produced the first of a long run of annual almanacs of predictions and weather forecasts, capitalising on the popularity of this new craze. Nostradamus's work catapulted him into the limelight, and he soon found himself catering for the prestigious, building up a client base that prized his ability to produce personalised predictions. Despite

DEFINING MOMENT

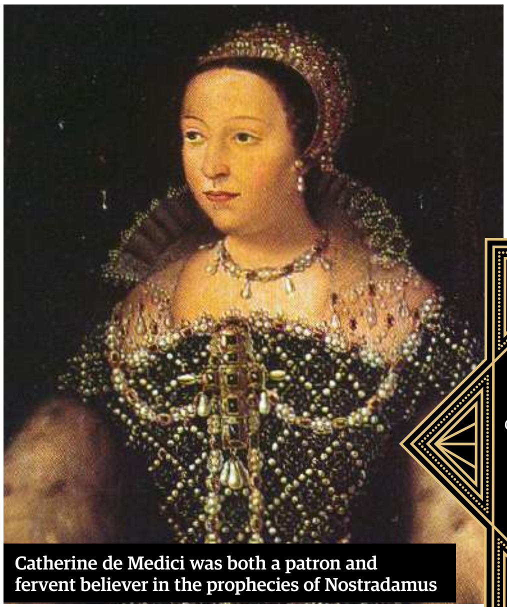
Launched into print

It was through the publication of his annual almanacs that Nostradamus made a name for himself and rose to prominence in the world of prediction and prophecy for which he became so famous, both in his own time and in the centuries since. In total, the yearly almanacs contained nearly 6,500 prophecies, proving immensely popular at the time of publication and paving the way to his later work on The Prophecies.

1550


N.ÆTATIS LXIII. CLARISSIMVS MICHAEL

> "Nostradamus's work catapulted him into the limelight, and he soon found himself catering for the wealthy and prestigious"



Catherine de Medici was both a patron and fervent believer in the prophecies of Nostradamus

DEFINING MOMENT

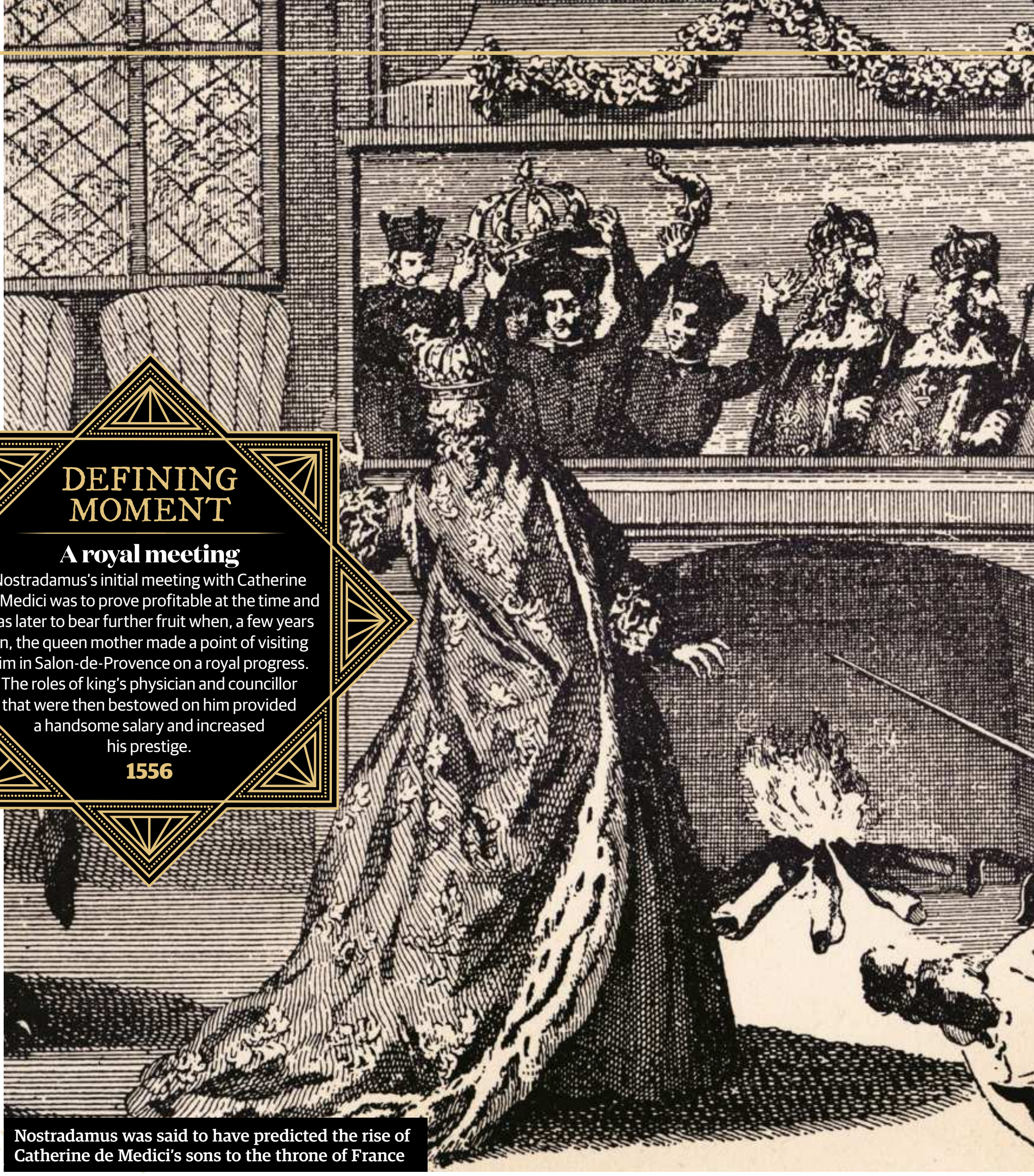
A royal meeting

Nostradamus's initial meeting with Catherine de Medici was to prove profitable at the time and was later to bear further fruit when, a few years on, the queen mother made a point of visiting him in Salon-de-Provence on a royal progress. The roles of king's physician and councillor that were then bestowed on him provided a handsome salary and increased his prestige.

1556

his reputation as a seer, however, Nostradamus expected his clients to do a lot of the legwork. Whereas a professional astrologer would calculate birth charts himself, Nostradamus requested this information be provided. This was potentially due to a lack of skill and confidence in that area, as the charts that he did produce did not stand up under scrutiny and led to criticism from other astrologers.

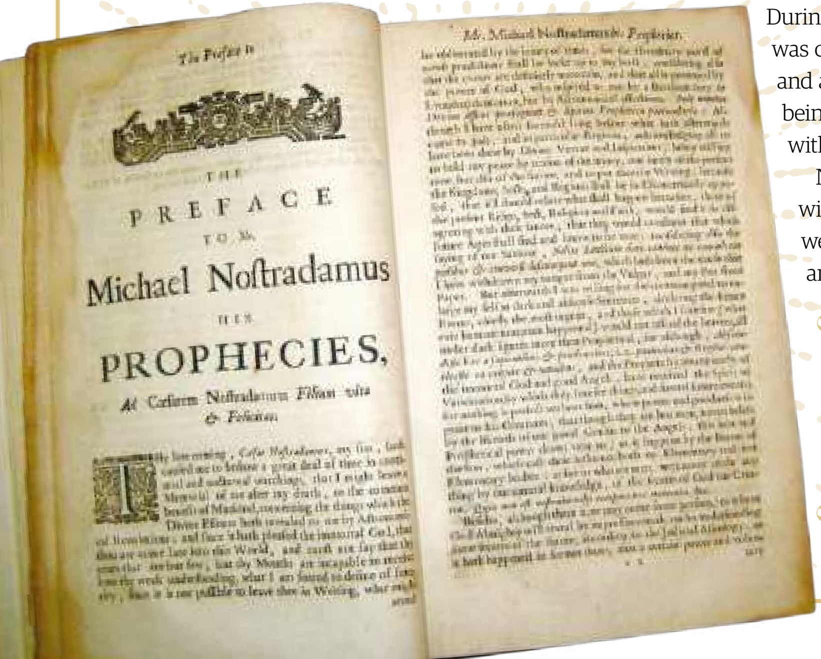
As Nostradamus rose to prominence in the world of the mystical and arcane, Catherine de Medici, queen of Henry II of France, also sought out his services. It could be said this was skilfully orchestrated by Nostradamus himself, as a prediction in his almanac for 1555 contained a prediction that hinted at impending danger for the royal family. Understandably worried by this and believing wholeheartedly in the power of such predictions, the queen summoned Nostradamus to Paris in 1556, and during the meeting, commissioned horoscopes for her children, including the future kings of France Charles IX and Henry of Anjou. Nostradamus is said to have predicted the rise of Anjou, something that must have caused great satisfaction for Catherine, especially as her son was at the time only sixth in line to the throne. They met again some years later when Nostradamus was an old man, in his native Salon-de-Provence itself. The royal party of Catherine and Charles IX braved the plague-ridden town to meet the man who Catherine held in such esteem. During the meeting, Nostradamus was created both a king's physician and a royal councillor, along with being rewarded for his services with 200 écus.



Nostradamus was said to have predicted the rise of Catherine de Medici's sons to the throne of France

Nostradamus was not popular with everyone, however. There were those who denounced him and called him a liar and a fake; some even went as far as to declare him insane or outright evil. This less than flattering reputation has survived long after his death due to the resurge of interest in the most popular and famous of Nostradamus's works - the predictions contained in the series of quatrains known as *The Prophecies*. Published in three editions, the last after his death, the quatrains speak in general terms of various types of catastrophes, focusing particularly on natural disasters such as earthquakes, plagues and floods, along with wars, murders and invasions. Some have even credited Nostradamus with predicting numerous pivotal events throughout history, from the Great Fire of London and the French Revolution to the two world wars, the 9/11 tragedy and even the death of Princess Diana.

The general vagueness of *The Prophecies* - in most cases the quatrains lack dates entirely, and where

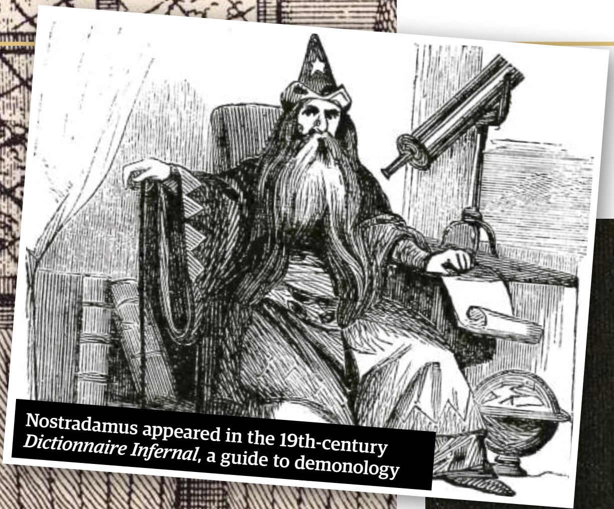


The Prophecies were translated into several languages and went through many editions

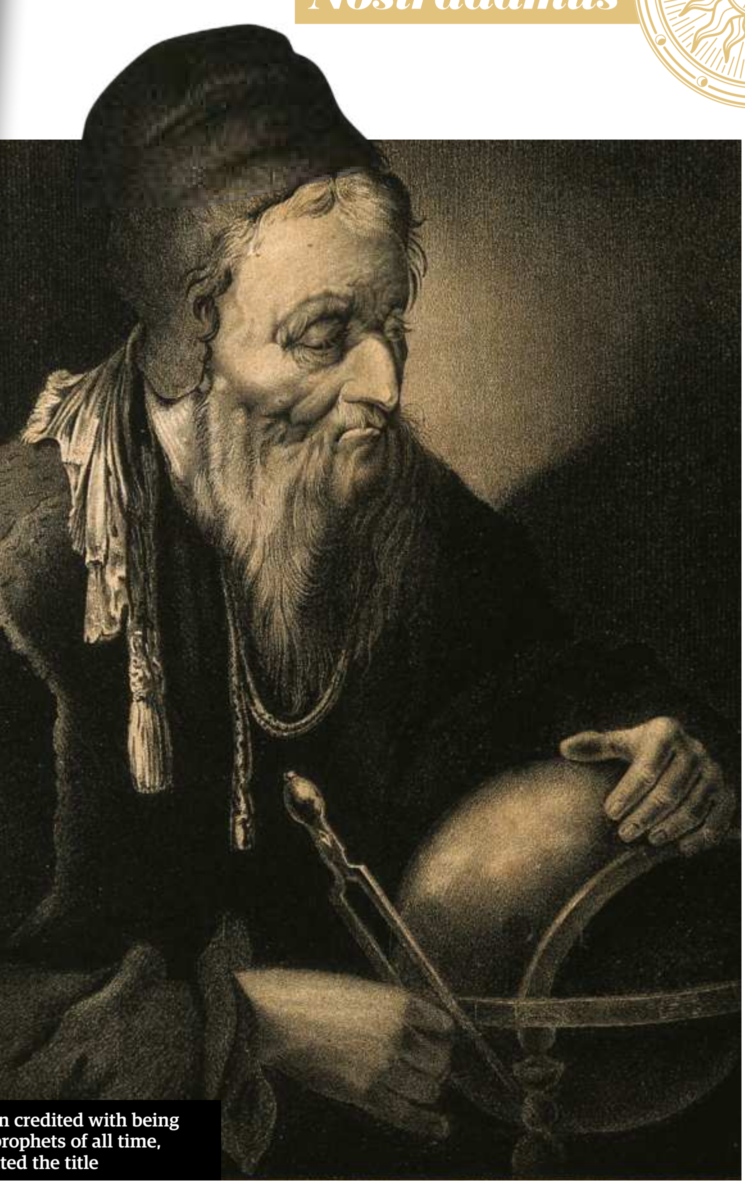
The Preface to

THE
PREFACE
TO M.
Michael Noſtradamus
HIS
PROPHECIES,
Ad Cæſarem Noſtradamum Filium vita & Felicitas.

> "Nostradamus did not fit the image of a man elected by god to bring his word to the world"



Nostradamus appeared in the 19th-century *Dictionnaire Infernal*, a guide to demonology



Nostradamus is often credited with being one of the greatest prophets of all time, even though he refuted the title

they are mentioned they are used in the most general terms - allows a reader to interpret his words according to their own beliefs and agenda. Indeed, one of the greatest criticisms of the writings of Nostradamus - both from his contemporaries and modern readers - is the general feeling of confusion due to the wordiness and lack of clarity, with more than one client complaining that they could not understand a word that had been written for them. This has been further hindered by the fact that no two editions or even copies in some cases of the quatrains are the same - both printing methods and the translation process have compounded the often-impenetrable nature of his works.

DEFINING MOMENT

End of Days

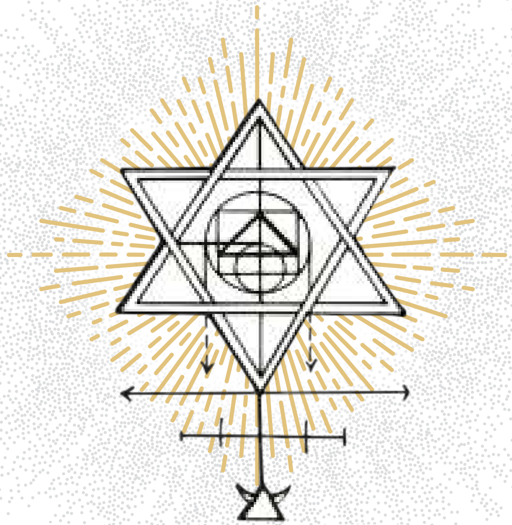
After his death, Nostradamus's reputation and reach continued to grow. The powers and pronouncements attributed to him have reached beyond the grave, including the (misinterpreted) assertion that the world would end in 2012. Nostradamus has been credited with predicting many historical events, and the legend lives on in reprintings of his works and more than 2,000 commentaries to date.

1566

Although heralded as a prophet, Nostradamus did not fit the image of a man elected by god to bring his word to the world, and in fact it was not a term Nostradamus used in relation to himself: he actually refuted the claim on at least one occasion in print. The label of prophet ascribed to him by his supporters - much like that of 'doctor,' which was used of him on several occasions despite the fact he had never achieved a degree in medicine - did more to enhance his status than hinder it, and it would have been a much less worldly man than Nostradamus who would have spurned the benefits from such an association.

It has been said that Nostradamus worried for his reputation and even his life on occasion. Some sources maintain that he feared the might and power of the Inquisition itself, although this has since been disputed by historians, as it was religious differences rather than any occult belief or practice that led to his brief conflict with the Church in Agen in 1538. There have also been several practices attributed to Nostradamus through the ages to enhance his occult status, with assertions made that he was adept in fire and water gazing. These claims, however, cannot be substantiated by any historical sources, and instead form part of the ever-evolving myth that surrounds Nostradamus. There is also little evidence to support accusations of secret adherence to Protestantism and any hostility towards the Catholic Church; his writings contain no censure of the church and he was favoured by Catholic leaders such as Catherine de Medici, his client base being drawn from a varied mix of Protestant and Catholic backgrounds.

By the mid-1560s, the elderly Nostradamus was not in good health, suffering increasingly from gout and dropsy. Perhaps sensing the end was near, he set his affairs in order, providing for his wife to live comfortably in the event she should remarry and also leaving provision for his children after his death. This was not done a moment too soon; on the night of 1 July 1566, according to legend, Nostradamus went to bed with the chilling prediction to his secretary that he would not be alive come morning. True to his word, he was discovered dead the next day, exactly as he had predicted.



John Dee

Occultist, mathematician, philosopher or spy: what lurked beneath the man who spanned the gap between magic and science?

Written by Willow Winsham

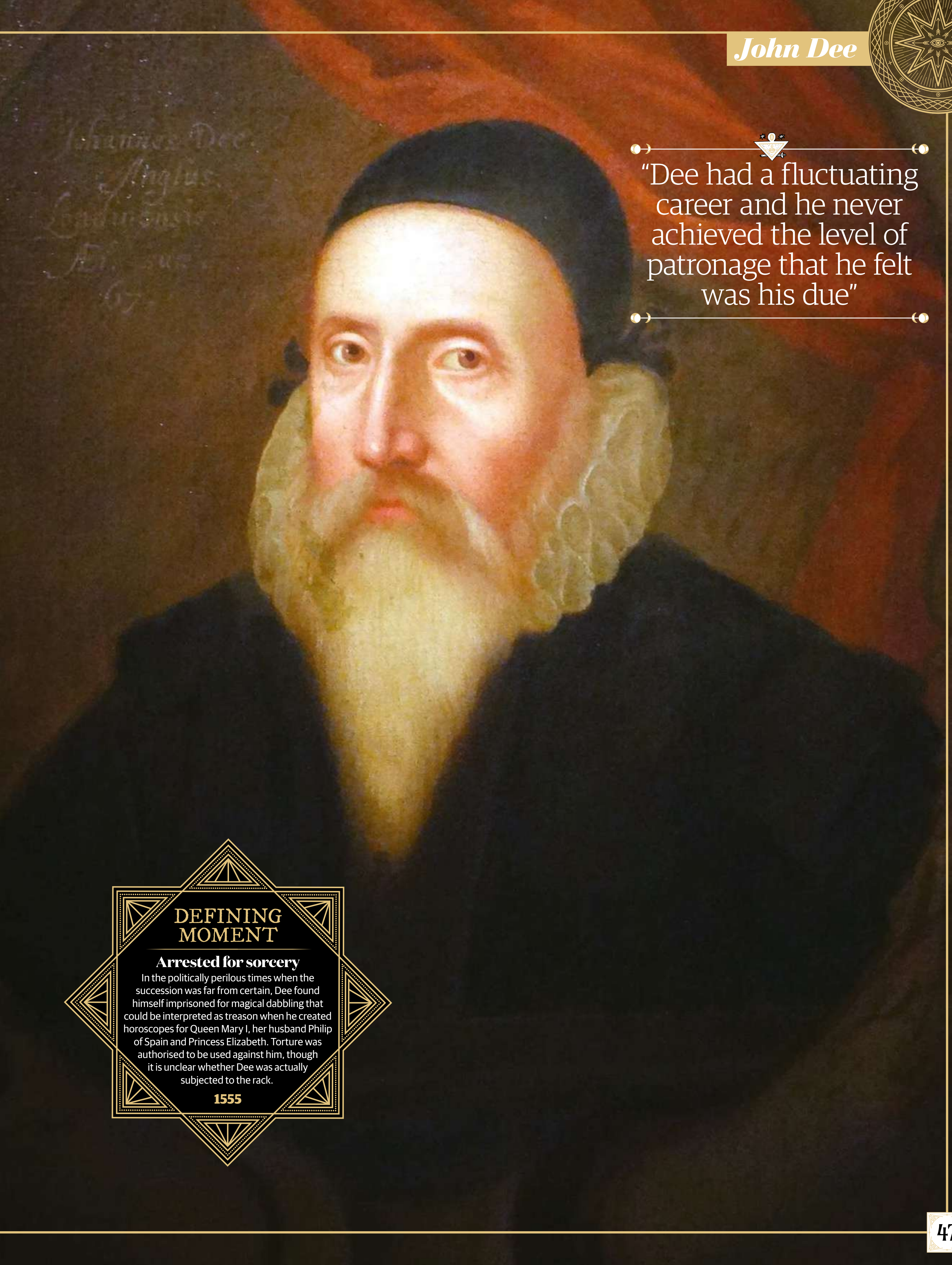
The London-born John Dee was actually of Welsh descent, his family having made a place for themselves in the capital after the accession of a fellow Welshman, Henry VII, to the English throne. Over the years, the young and ambitious Dee invented a lineage that was far grander than his true humble beginnings, claiming a family connection with various Welsh princes, and even suggesting descent from the fabled King Arthur himself.

Dee gained his Bachelor's degree in 1545 from Cambridge. During his time at university, he had his first brush with the occult, in the form of alchemical studies, and came across the mathematical concepts that would become the basis of many of his later ideas. By the time he left university for good, he had already established something of a reputation in this area, though this did not stop him from taking Holy Orders in 1554.

Trouble erupted in 1555 when Dee was engaged by Queen Mary Tudor to use his already established skills to see what lay in store for herself and her half-sister, Princess Elizabeth. He found himself in hot water when on 28 May, he and his associates were arrested on suspicion of magic, a charge that rapidly escalated in the volatile political climate of the time to that of conjuring and witchcraft. Despite the potentially fatal situation, Dee was eventually cleared of all charges, and emerged as household chaplain to Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London.

Upon the accession of Elizabeth I in 1558, Dee's fortunes appeared to be improving. The new monarch was said to have chosen her coronation date based on a horoscope that Dee had cast for her and he was generally held in favour by the Queen. Despite this seemingly auspicious start and the connection he had with Elizabeth throughout his life, Dee had a fluctuating career and he never achieved the level of patronage and recognition that he felt was his due.

By the 1560s, the mystically inclined Dee had fully embraced the occult and arcane, and in 1564 he produced a work titled *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, exploring the meaning of a glyph that he himself had created. Ever hopeful, he dedicated the decidedly dense text to Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II, though again it did not bring the rewards Dee had hoped for. More success came from his attempts to have references to himself as a conjuror removed from Foxe's highly popular work, *Acts And Monuments*: the critical comments were removed from later editions of the text, though his reputation in the wider world could not be changed so easily.



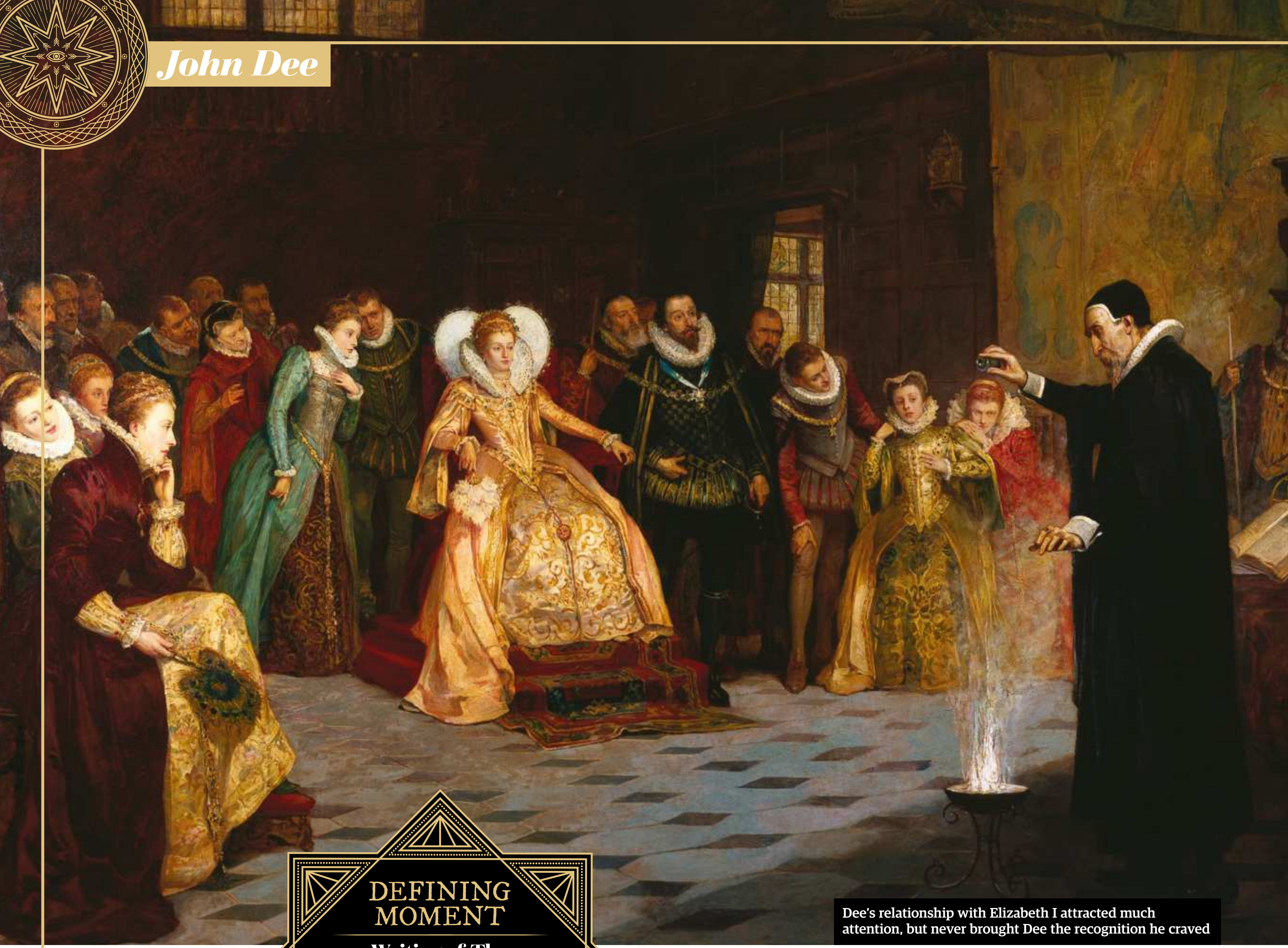
> “Dee had a fluctuating career and he never achieved the level of patronage that he felt was his due”

DEFINING MOMENT

Arrested for sorcery

In the politically perilous times when the succession was far from certain, Dee found himself imprisoned for magical dabbling that could be interpreted as treason when he created horoscopes for Queen Mary I, her husband Philip of Spain and Princess Elizabeth. Torture was authorised to be used against him, though it is unclear whether Dee was actually subjected to the rack.

1555



Dee's relationship with Elizabeth I attracted much attention, but never brought Dee the recognition he craved

DEFINING MOMENT

Writing of The Hieroglyphic Monad

Dee produced many works throughout his life, covering mathematics, philosophy and the occult, but it was this work, written in 12 days, that was considered most important by his contemporaries and continues to intrigue and confuse readers today. This work is taken as evidence of the link between Dee and Rosicrucian ideas.

1564

Dee was also vociferous in his support of English expansion in the New World, and he devoted much time and effort to this cause, attempting to boost England's claims over those of Spain in the continuing battle for supremacy over the territory. In 1577 he published *General And Rare Memorials Pertaining To The Perfect Art Of Navigation*, outlining his ambitious ideas regarding England's developing empire. As was the case with so many of his visions, however, the majority of his ideas in this area were not adopted.

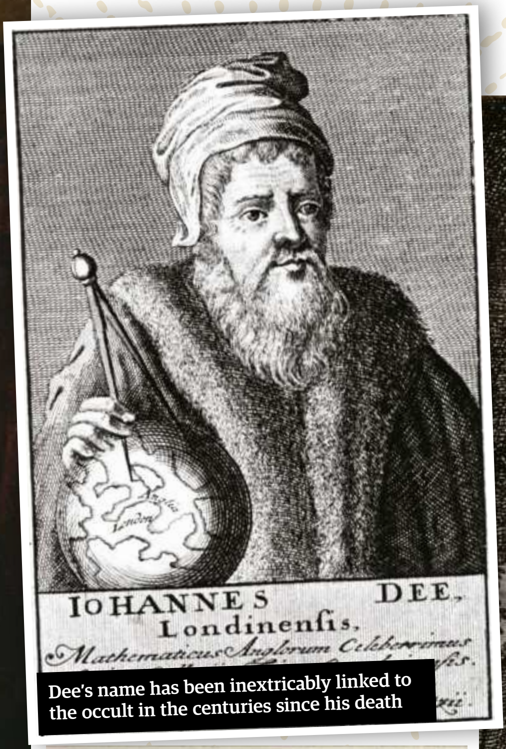
A great lover of books, Dee turned his attentions to developing a private library in his Mortlake home. He expanded it into a great wonder, including many texts of an occult nature, and it was known as one of the leading libraries in Europe and the largest personally owned library in England during his lifetime. The great fascination of the occult coupled with a burning desire for greater recognition was again made clear in 1574, when Dee wrote to William Cecil, Lord Treasurer to Elizabeth I. Dee apparently claimed to have knowledge of hidden treasure in the Welsh Marches, hinting at his ability to recover it for the right patron.

The 1580s saw Dee into his fifties and signalled a change of direction, as he finally acknowledged his disappointment about his lack of advancement. As such, Dee switched his attentions even more fully towards the occult, and it was now that he devoted himself to communicating with spirits and angels. For this work he required a partner skilled in the art of crystal gazing to act as go-between for the two worlds and, after impressing him at an audition, Dee finally settled on the unlikely choice of convicted criminal Edward Kelley.

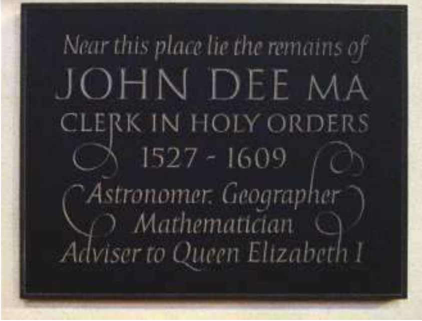
Their attempts were deemed successful, and Dee fully believed that, through Kelley, they had made contact with angels. These communications were meticulously recorded by Dee. Despite his links with the occult, he was a devout Christian, and prayer and fasting played a large role in his spiritual communications. His motives were also not, arguably, entirely selfish – he believed, apparently wholeheartedly, that what he was learning through Kelley and the angels would be profitable to the entire human race.

Kelley was not the only questionable individual to whom Dee was drawn in his lifetime; it was during this decade that Dee, at the behest of Albert Leski, a Polish nobleman, was induced to uproot his family, along with Kelley, and move to Poland. The whole situation soon fell apart, as it transpired that Leski didn't have a penny to his name and was even further from favour at his native court

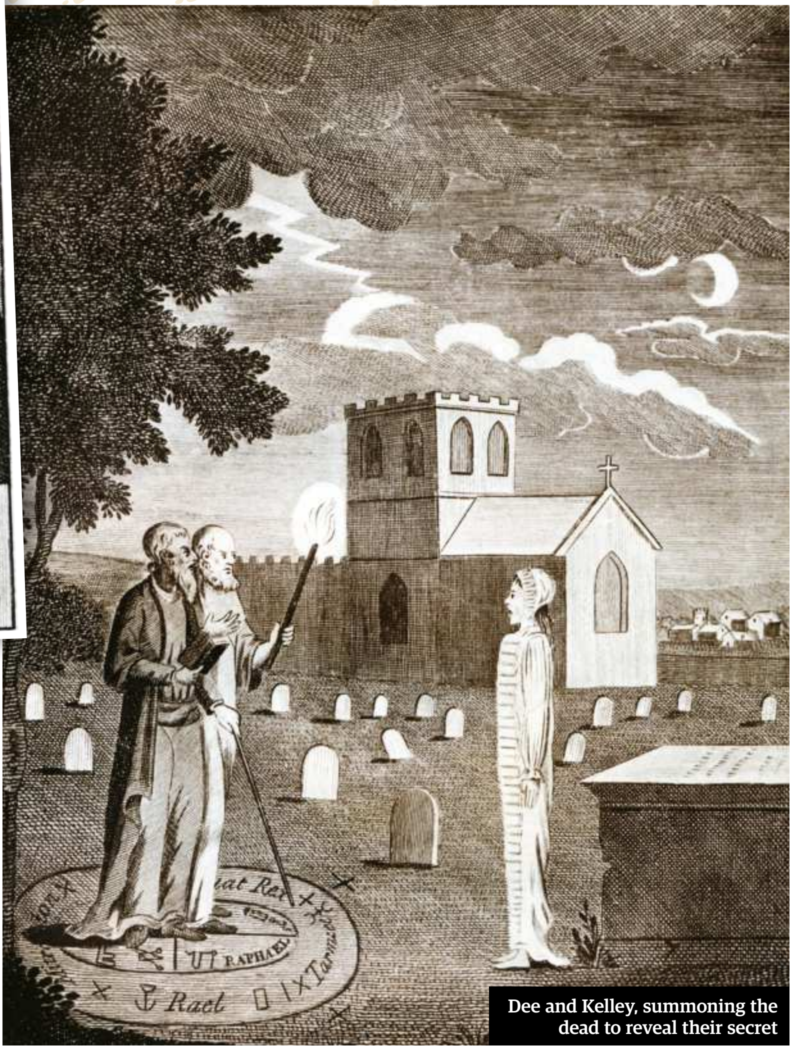
> "He believed… that what he was learning through Kelley and the angels would be profitable to the entire human race"



Dee's name has been inextricably linked to the occult in the centuries since his death


Near this place lie the remains of
JOHN DEE MA
CLERK IN HOLY ORDERS
1527 - 1609
Astronomer. Geographer
Mathematician
Adviser to Queen Elizabeth I

A memorial plaque for Dee, hung inside St Mary the Virgin Mortlake in 2013



Dee and Kelley, summoning the dead to reveal their secret

than Dee felt at his own. Instead of returning home however, Dee, with the ever-present Kelley and their families, embarked upon a tour of Europe. They continued their angelic communications (indeed it had been the angels that told them, according to Kelley, to go to Poland with Leski in the first place). The pair attempted to interest some great names in their work with angels, holding an audience with Emperor Rudolf II and King Stefan Batory of Poland.

Even here Dee lost out; while he focused on angelic communication, Kelley's skill at alchemy saw his eventual appointment as chief alchemist to the Emperor.

It was this time in Europe that helped promote Dee's lingering reputation as a spy in the pay of Elizabeth I. Despite being greatly respected for his intellectual abilities, there was an ever-present suspicion from the monarchs he approached.

As the decade neared an end, relations between Kelley and Dee began to deteriorate. This was not helped by the younger man - Kelley was nearly 30 years Dee's junior - announcing that one of their angel communicators had declared that the men must share everything in common - including, much to Dee's consternation - their wives. Although it appears that this arrangement was entered into, Dee and Kelley parted company not long afterwards - though there continues to be some dispute as to the parentage of the child born nine months later to Dee's third wife.

His long absence from home had serious consequences. The house at Mortlake was in a sorry state due to vandalism, and his precious library had been ransacked. The political and religious environment to which he returned was also not very welcoming, the tide having turned against the occult beliefs that Dee held so dear and leaving him with even less hope of gaining favour. Despite this he was granted the role of warden at Christ's College, Manchester in 1595, but the 68-year-old Dee didn't manage to properly benefit even here as he was not held in any great respect by those he kept watch over. He also came under fire for his involvement with the exorcist craze that gripped the capital around that time, and for his apparent connection to John Darrell, as well as claims of fraudulent possession. All of this mean that any hopes of further promotion or advancement were completely dashed by the end of the affair.

Rumours still persist to this day, but it is highly unlikely that Dee was a member of the Rosicrucian Order, and in fact there is no hard evidence that the Order even existed during Dee's lifetime. Along with some of the more extreme claims regarding Dee, the factual truth does very little to hamper the persistent legends surrounding this learned and intriguing figure.

Dee fared little better when James I followed Elizabeth on the throne, and the new monarch was not interested in supporting the famed occultist. Dee went on to live out his years in poverty and died in c.1609 at Mortlake, under the care of his daughter Katherine.

DEFINING MOMENT

Meeting Edward Kelley

Dee's relationship with Kelley defined a large portion of his life, the younger man facilitating Dee's desire to explore angelic communication and leading him deeper into the world of the occult. Several texts were dictated by the angels through Kelley and faithfully recorded by Dee, which provided valuable insights into their work together.

1582

© Alamy, Thinkstock

Oracle bones

Divining doesn't stop at animal entrails. During the Shang dynasty, the Chinese carved questions into ox bones and turtle shells, hoping for answers

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

Pyromancy, or the art of divination by means of fire, was heavily used by diviners in ancient China, mainly during the late Shang dynasty, specifically scapulimancy and plastromancy, both of which involved reading oracle bones.

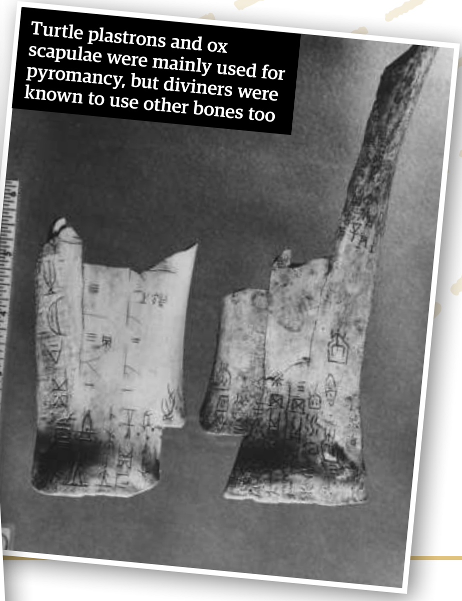
Many of the divining questions were directed at the ancestors, whom the ancient Chinese worshipped and revered

Questions regarding crops, weather, military endeavours, the fortunes of members of the royal family and the like were presented to diviners, who would use a sharp tool to carve the questions into pieces of ox scapula (scapulimancy) and turtle plastron (plastromancy) in oracle bone script. To receive the answers, they would heat a metal rod and apply it to the bone or shell until it gave way to thermal expansion and cracked. The diviners were then able to interpret the pattern left by the cracks, and record their prognostication.

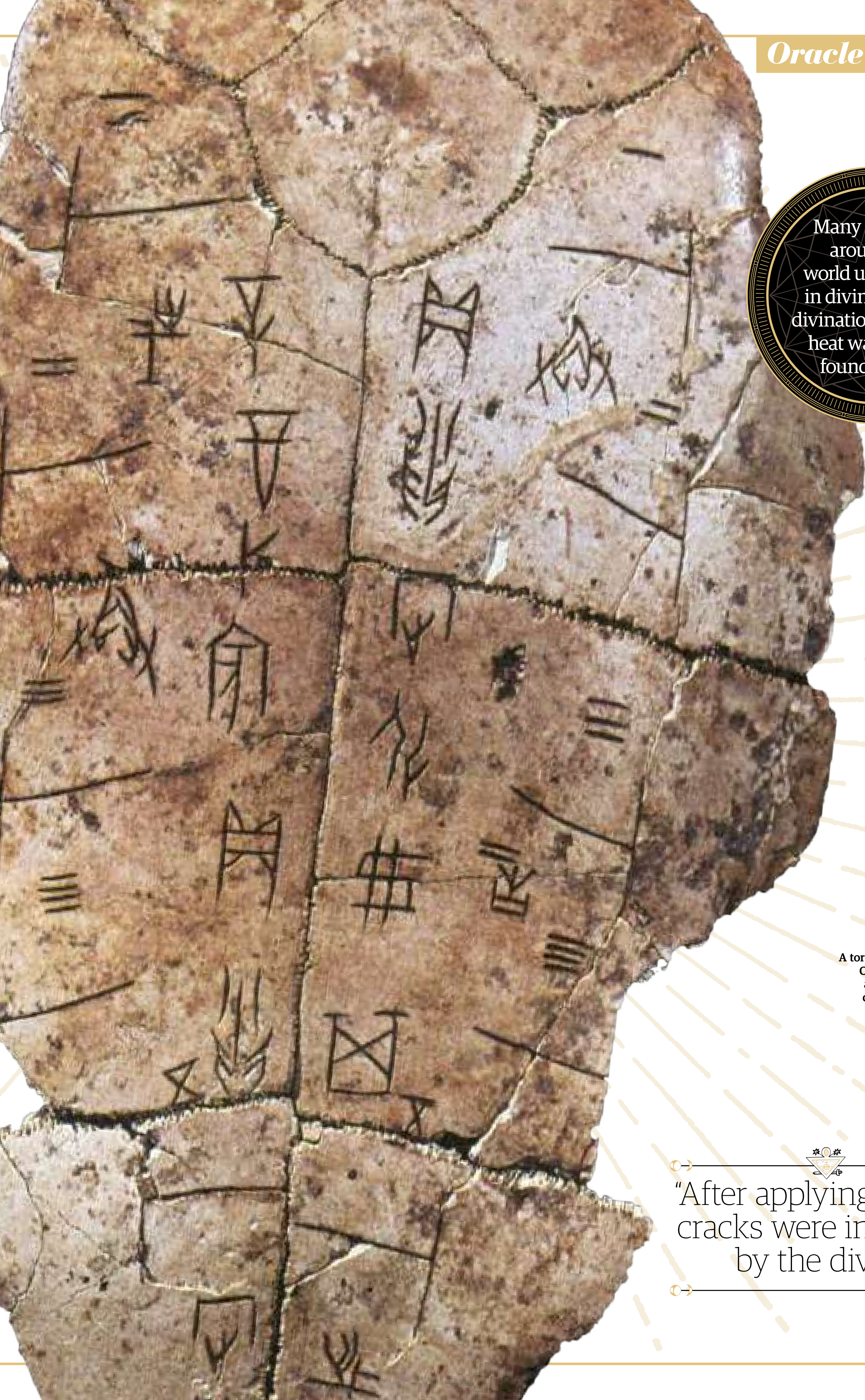
Though turtle plastrons (the ventral and belly shells, usually from female turtles) and ox scapulae were primarily used for this kind of pyromancy, other animal bones were occasionally inscribed too – including the skulls of deer, oxen and humans. While preparing the oracle bones for use in a divining ceremony, diviners would clean them of flesh, and then thoroughly scour them to create a smooth, flat surface. Pits and hollows were then drilled partway into the bones in rows, which predetermined what kind of cracks would form during the divination. They would anoint the bones with blood before using ordinals called the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches to record the date, the diviner's name and the question. After applying a heat source, the cracks were interpreted by the diviner in charge of the ceremony, but the way in which they were interpreted is still unknown.

Scapulimancy and plastromancy both endured in China through to the Zhou dynasty, and during the Sui and Tang dynasties local farmers began periodically unearthing the oracle bones. Not realising what they were, the bones were frequently reburied. However, they were uncovered once again during the 19th century and were often used in place of 'dragon bones' in traditional Chinese medicine, where ancient pharmacists would grind up Pleistocene fossils to use in tonics and poultices. Ground turtle shells were used to treat malaria, while powdered ox bones (among bones from other animals) were used on knife wounds. Unfortunately, later questions to the diviners were written with brushes and cinnabar ink instead of being carved into the bones, so the recorded prophecies have since faded with time.

Oracle bones are still being discovered all over China in archaeological dig sites, like this one in Qishan County



Turtle plastrons and ox scapulae were mainly used for pyromancy, but diviners were known to use other bones too



Many societies around the world used bones in divination, but divination involving heat was mostly found in Asia

A tortoise shell inscribed with Chinese characters during a divination ritual, Shang dynasty (c.1766-1122 BCE)

> "After applying heat, the cracks were interpreted by the diviner"

© Alamy, Getty Images

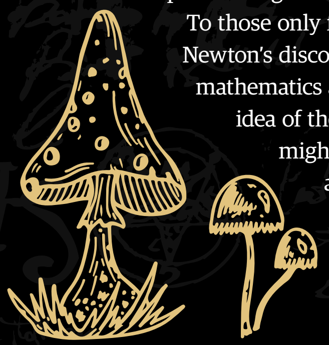
Secrets of the Alchemists

Medieval alchemists tried to find the ancient recipe for making gold and achieving immortality. None succeeded, yet modern science owes much to their techniques

Written by Erich B Anderson

In 1666, renowned English mathematician, astronomer and natural philosopher, Sir Isaac Newton, observed light entering a prism, and from this experience he made a brilliant discovery about light and colour; that white light is made up of a spectrum of several colours. He was fascinated with light, and believed that it had a close relationship to the concept that the early modern scientist knew as 'the vegetable spirit.'

Newton was constantly awed by the beauty and complexity nature. Over time, he concluded that the massive variety of life and processes that occur in nature, such as growth and decay, meant there must be some driving force making it all happen. He believed that the 'vegetable spirit' was that force, and he thought it might be linked with the power of light.



To those only familiar with Newton's discoveries in mathematics and physics, the idea of the 'vegetable spirit' might seem strange, and even pseudo-scientific. On the other hand, this idea and several others of the famous scientist were closely associated with a subject that he is not very often known for studying, and yet spent a great amount of his time devoted to: alchemy. In his lifetime, Newton wrote around one million words on alchemy, which shows how committed he was to the practice. Through his research into alchemy, Newton hoped to uncover the secret of the 'vegetable spirit', or the spirit of life.

Even to Newton in the 17th century, alchemy was an archaic art with hundreds of texts available for him to study. But Newton was not the first person to turn to alchemy in order to find what he was looking for, and was in fact one of the last in a long line of alchemists who sought to use the art for the purpose of discovering the universe's remarkable secrets.

The primary mission of ancient and Medieval alchemists was finding the way to create gold and the elixir of life. Unfortunately for them and Newton, alchemy has been shrouded in secrets and mystery throughout its existence, particularly during the Medieval period. Alchemists have repeatedly defended this secrecy, stating that its purpose is to keep the spectacular knowledge hidden from unworthy individuals who might use it for nefarious gains (though today we might suspect that the true reason for the secrecy is that, from the very beginning, the goals of the alchemists were impossible to achieve).

The origins of alchemy can be traced back 2,000 years before Newton to the ancient Egyptians and Greeks. In fact, the word 'alchemy' may be derived from Khem, which was an ancient Greek term for Egypt. Even though alchemical tradition often states that the founding father of the practice was Hermes Trismegistus, it is very difficult to tie the root of alchemy to one person. On the other hand, it is much more likely that the first proto-alchemists were Egyptian metalworkers, who would have worked with several different types of metal. It was gold that had the most value, therefore many focused their attention on this precious metal.

Over time, the experience of working with gold, silver and other metals led the most talented craftsmen to develop impressive alloys. Eventually, many different types of 'gold' entered the market, with major economic consequences as the manipulated metals and alloys were not in fact gold, but convincing fakes. By the time the Romans controlled Egypt, counterfeit gold had become such a problem that the Roman Emperor Diocletian (reigning between 284-305) ordered for the destruction of every single text that covered the making of gold or other metalwork.

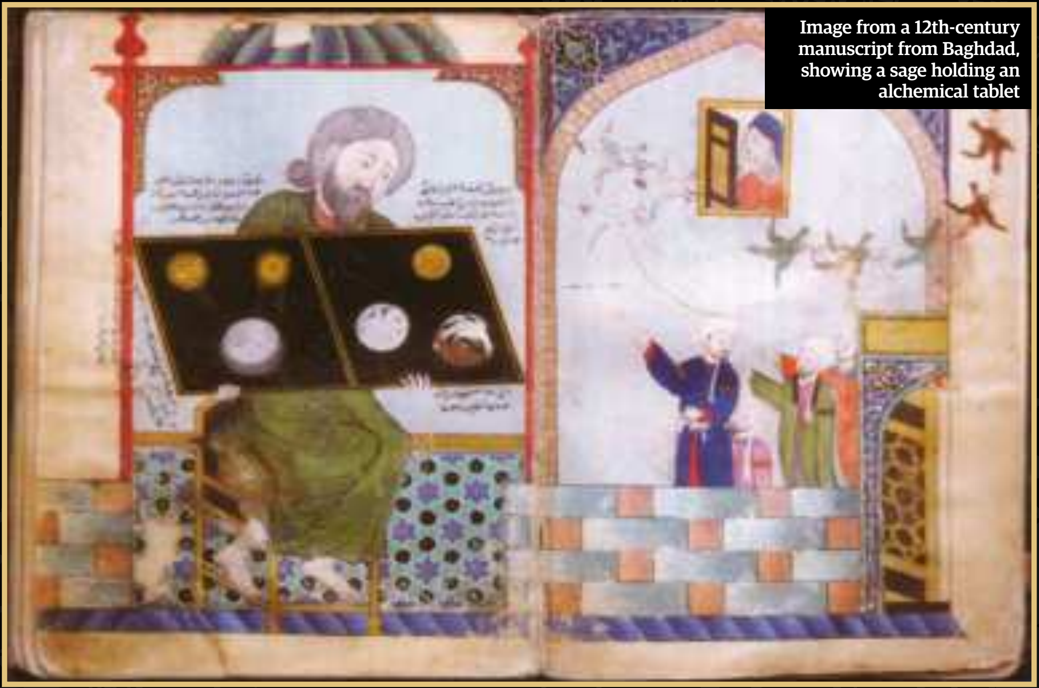
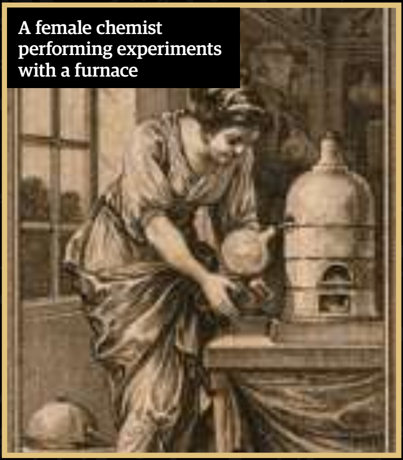
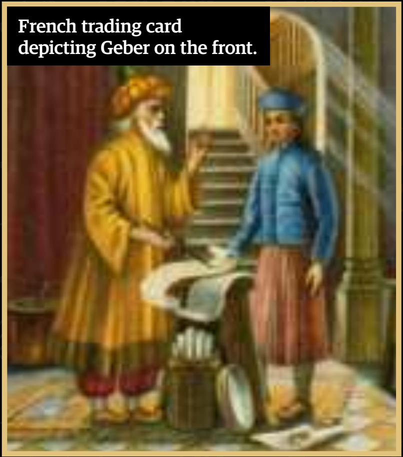


Image from a 12th-century manuscript from Baghdad, showing a sage holding an alchemical tablet

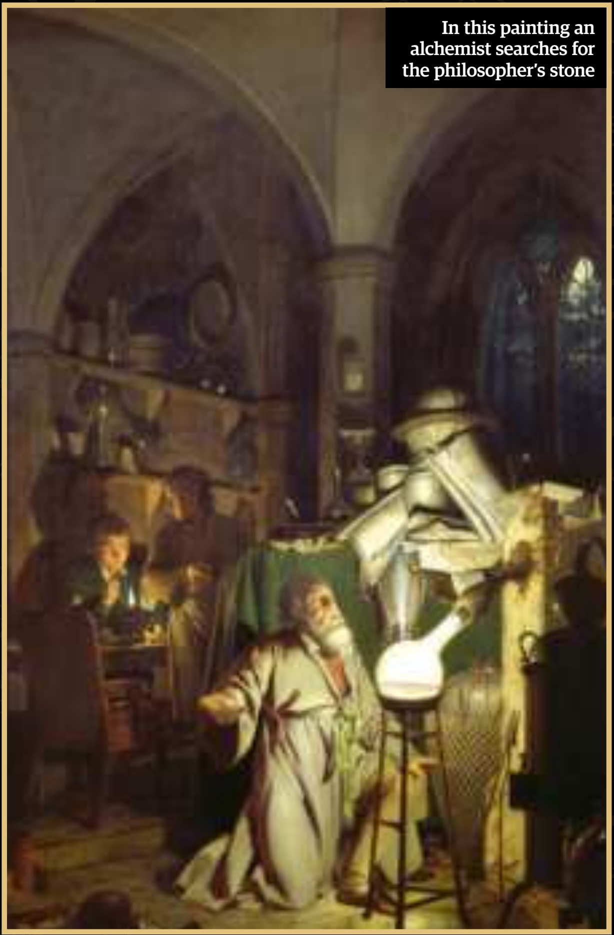
> "The origins of alchemy can be traced back 2,000 years before Newton to the ancient Egyptians and Greeks"



A female chemist performing experiments with a furnace



French trading card depicting Geber on the front.



In this painting an alchemist searches for the philosopher's stone

The Greeks also played an important role in the early development of alchemy. However, these men were philosophers who were more often than not thinkers rather than doers, so their contribution was primarily focused on theories involving the nature of substances. The first alchemical documents were papyri written in Greek, often including processes and recipes in the creation of gold-like metals and alloys.

The teachings of Aristotle from the 4th century BCE made a profound impact on alchemical thought, as well as other Greek writers both before and after him. Yet it was not until Zosimos of Panopolis, who thrived c.300, that numerous alchemical texts began to emerge, which differed from the earlier papyri. In the writings of Zosimos, the practice of alchemy became less straightforward and more vague. For instance, he began to speak in riddles and used phrases whose meaning is difficult to determine. Zosimos may have been one of the first alchemists to conceal his ideas through secrecy and symbolism, but he started a tradition that later became central to the alchemical world.

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century, the Islamic conquests made the Arabic civilisation one of the chief powers of the world. In this golden age of Islamic culture, Arabic scholars worked diligently to translate earlier Greco-Roman texts and assimilate as much of their ancient knowledge as possible. Especially after Egypt fell under Arabic control, documents that covered alchemy were also discovered and incorporated into the works of the early Islamic scholars. It is often thought that the term 'alchemy' was actually created in this period, because it combined the word Khem with the Arabic definite article al-, such as in the words alcohol and algebra. Furthermore, the key to immortality - which was just as important to alchemists as gold creation - is known as the elixir of life, from the Arabic word 'al-iksir'.

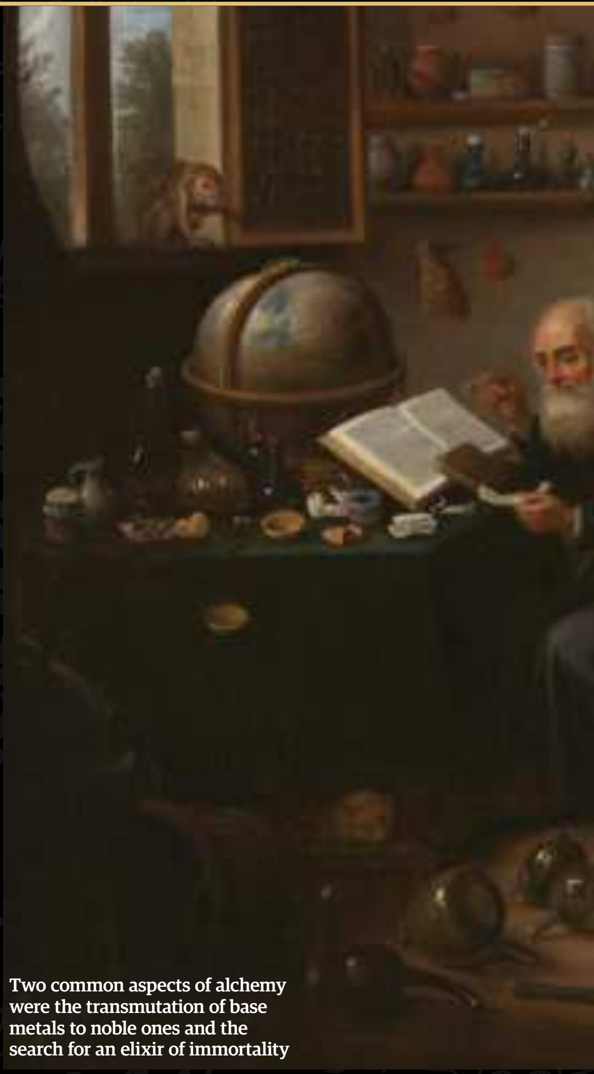
The most prominent Arabic alchemist was Jábir ibn Háyyan, or Geber to western Europeans, of c.760. From the writings of Aristotle, Geber theorised that metals were created from a combination of mercury and sulphur, which became a fundamental aspect of alchemy. After Geber, the physician and philosopher Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya Al-Razi (or Rasis) dealt with alchemy during

the 9th century, followed by Abu Ali ibn Sina (or Avicenna) in the 10th century. Once the works of these men and other Arabic scholars reached the Latin literate west, interest in alchemy was reignited throughout Medieval Europe.

Albertus Magnus, a Dominican from Swabia, was the primary scholar responsible for reintroducing alchemy to Europe in the 13th century. Albertus supported the mercury-sulphur theory of Geber, and although he believed that transmutation (the changing of matter into another form) was possible, he admitted it was very difficult to do. In 1244-5, Thomas Aquinas became the pupil of Albertus, and the master taught him what he knew, including his knowledge of alchemy. The other major alchemist of the 13th century, Roger Bacon, wrote about two different kinds: practical and theoretical. Bacon praised the first type for he truly believed that, if done right, the processes could improve metals and make them better than the state in which they are found in nature.

Albertus, Bacon and the other prominent alchemists of the era all believed that transmutation could be achieved, especially with metals. However, none of them could prove it. It was during this time that the philosopher's stone began to increasingly appear within alchemical texts. Since transmutation was possible according to the alchemists, many began to believe that they simply lacked one vital ingredient to make the process work, which was the stone. And as the idea of the stone became more popular, so too did the alchemical texts become increasingly more difficult to interpret, as riddles, symbolism and coded language became more and more prevalent.

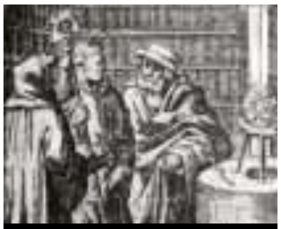
It is basically impossible to know exactly what the philosopher's stone was, or would have been, because there have been so many different theories written about the substance. Some alchemists believed that the stone was comprised of the old common alchemical ingredients of mercury and sulphur, along with the new addition of salt, but with one major twist; these components were not just simply mercury, sulphur and salt, but rather special substances in a pure state with magical qualities, commonly referred to as the 'essences' of mercury, sulphur and salt.



Two common aspects of alchemy were the transmutation of base metals to noble ones and the search for an elixir of immortality

Legendary alchemists

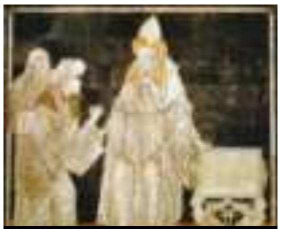
The major figures of alchemy from the ancient world to the Renaissance



Thomas Norton with Abbot Cremer and Basil Valentine

Thomas Norton

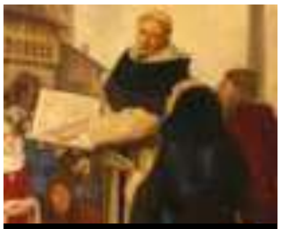
Thomas Norton, who lived from c.1433-1513, was the disciple of another famous English alchemist called George Ripley. As an alchemist, Thomas was supposedly successful in creating the elixir of life not once but twice, only to have it stolen from him on both occasions; however, he is most well-known as an alchemist for writing the *Ordinal Of Alchemy*.



15th-century depiction of Hermes Trismegistus

Hermes Trismegistus

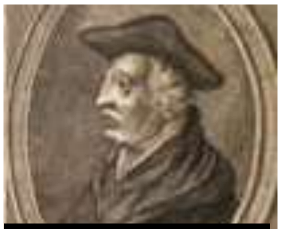
Hermes Trismegistus is often considered to be the founder of ancient alchemy. Although he was most likely a mythical figure, he was believed by many to have lived at the same time as Moses. Other theories about his mysterious origins depict him as a god descended from the Greek god known as Hermes. The early 14th century treatise *De Mineralibus*, attributed to Albertus Magnus, is the first Western text to mention him.



Albertus Magnus describing his scientific theories to others

Albertus Magnus

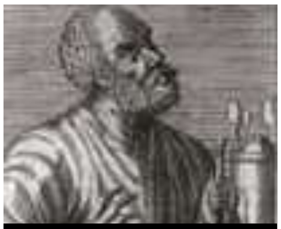
Born at the beginning of the 13th century, Albertus Magnus was a Dominican who was given the title of Doctor Universalis by the Catholic Church, as he was the most prominent scholar of his time in the natural sciences. He was considered to be a theologian, inventor, astrologer and magician, but known to later alchemists as chief expert in alchemy during the early Medieval era. Outside of alchemy, Albertus gained fame as the teacher of St Thomas Aquinas.



18th-century portrait engraving of Roger Bacon

Roger Bacon

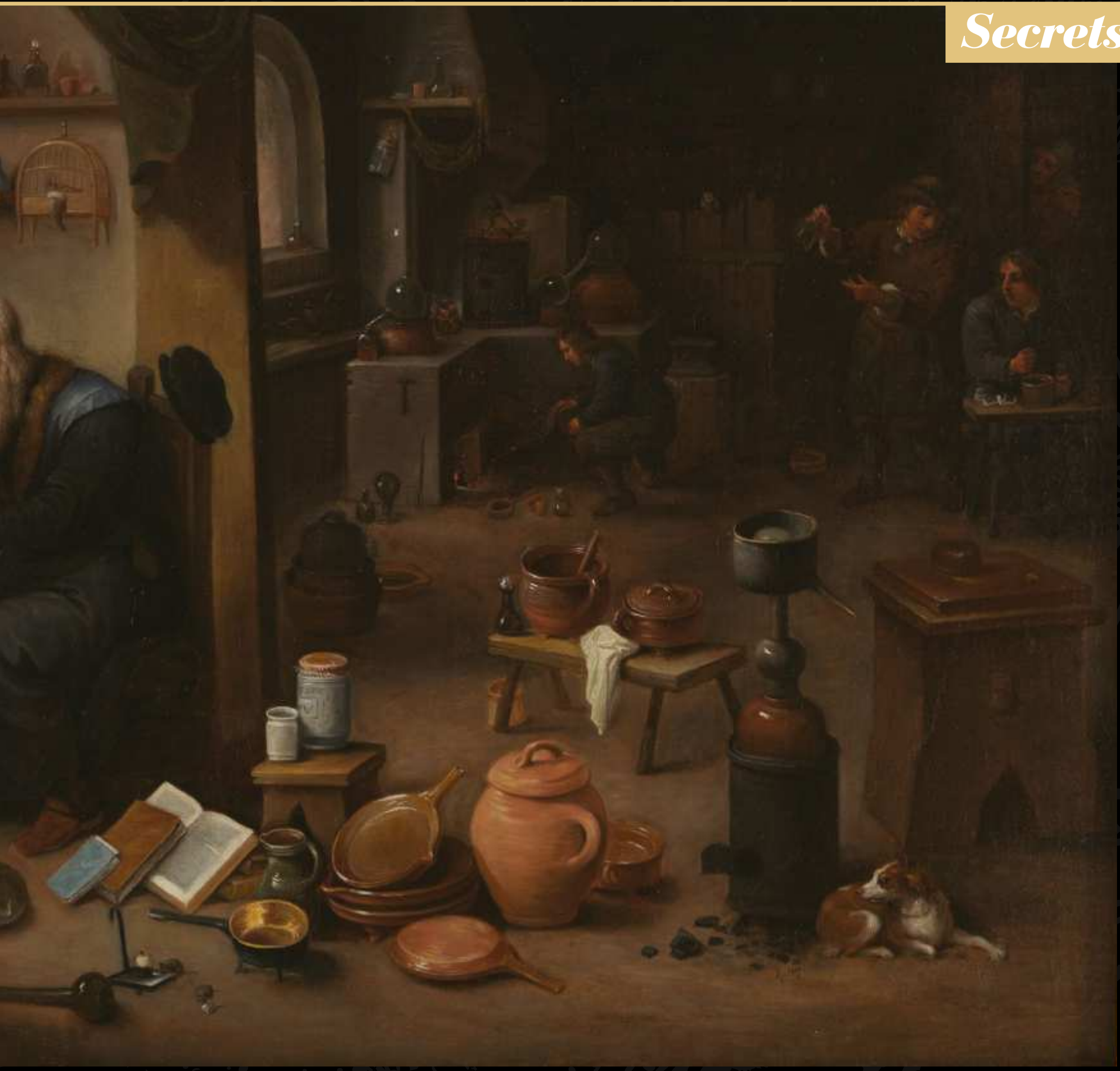
A Franciscan, Roger Bacon was also the first Englishman of any renown to study and practise alchemy. A contemporary of Albertus, Bacon lived from c.1220-1292 and was known as a magician and miracle-worker, but he was also a major supporter of pure experimentation, and wanted to improve upon the scientific methods of the time. Works attributed to Bacon were some of the first to lead alchemists on the quest for the philosopher's stone.



Depiction of the Arabian alchemist Jábir ibn Háyyan

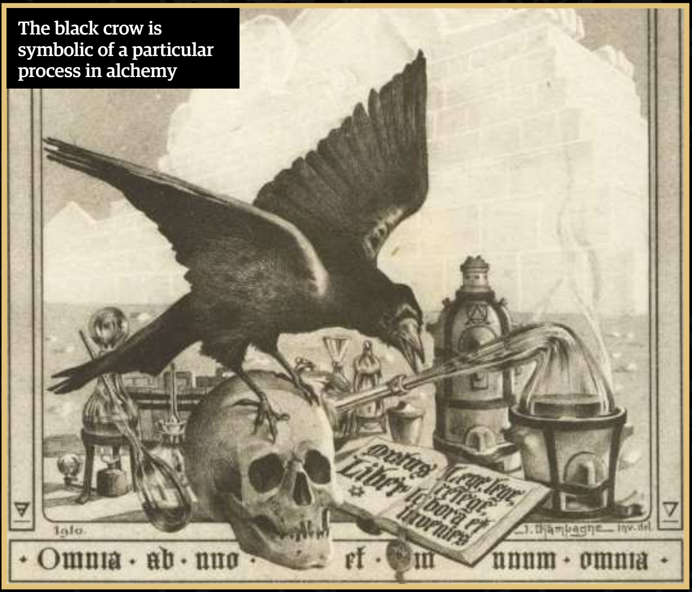
'Geber' or Jábir ibn Háyyan

Known by Latin speakers of the west as Geber, many works on alchemy were attributed to Jábir ibn Háyyan. It is possible that he lived during the 8th century when the Arabs were discovering and translating ancient Greco-Roman texts, therefore he contributed to this. His work the *Summa Perfectionis Magisterii* was the primary source of information on chemicals for most of Medieval Europe, but it may have been the work of another alchemist.



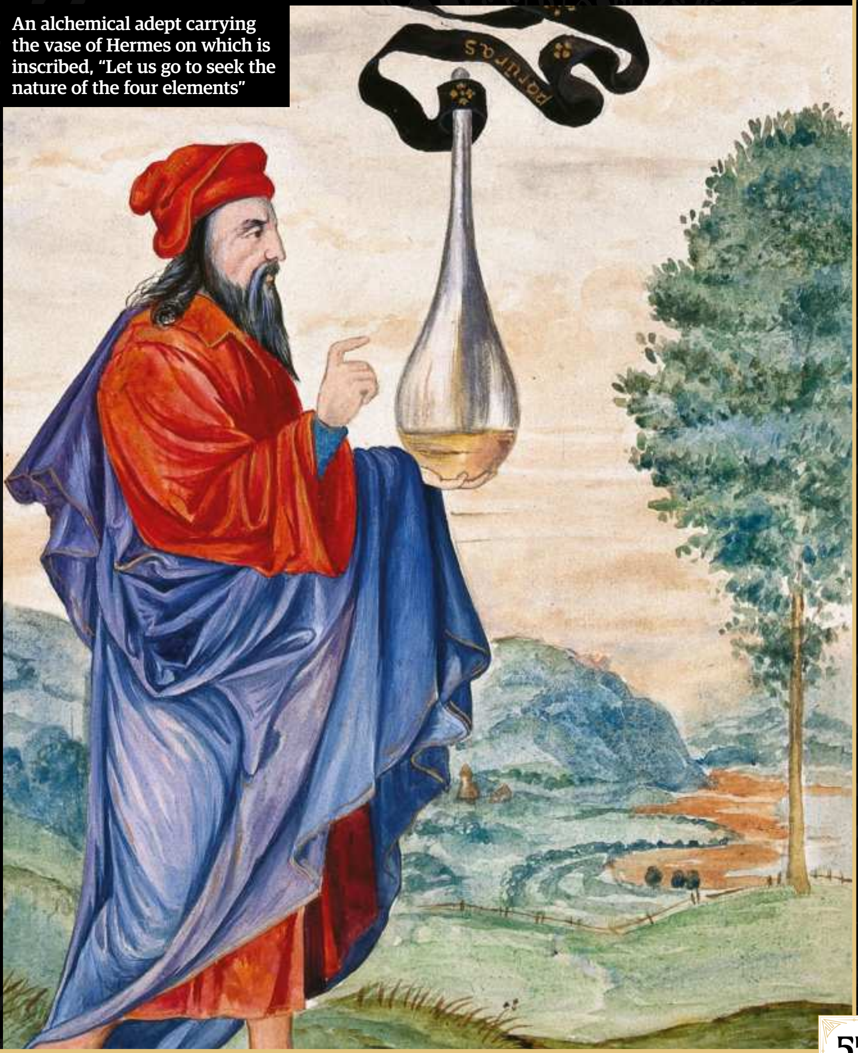
There were other theories about the makeup of the stone, too. Similar to Newton's idea of the 'vegetable spirit', some alchemists thought of the philosopher's stone as the seed of gold that could be obtained from the metal. To the Medieval mind, metals were similar to vegetation, in that they both grew in the earth. Therefore, metals had seeds and the most precious seed of all was that of gold.

Regardless of the increasing secrecy surrounding alchemy, hundreds of alchemists from many different backgrounds were desperate to find or manufacture whatever was necessary in order to obtain the philosopher's stone. Since the incredible substance could be used to serve the purpose of creating gold and the elixir of life, some alchemists sought enormous wealth, some desired fame, and others wanted the key to never-ending life, while there were some who had the grand aspirations of flooding the market with so much gold that the economic system would collapse and the world would be turned upside down. There were those who did gain fame or notoriety for their alchemical exploits, yet all of the other dreams were never fulfilled. In the end,



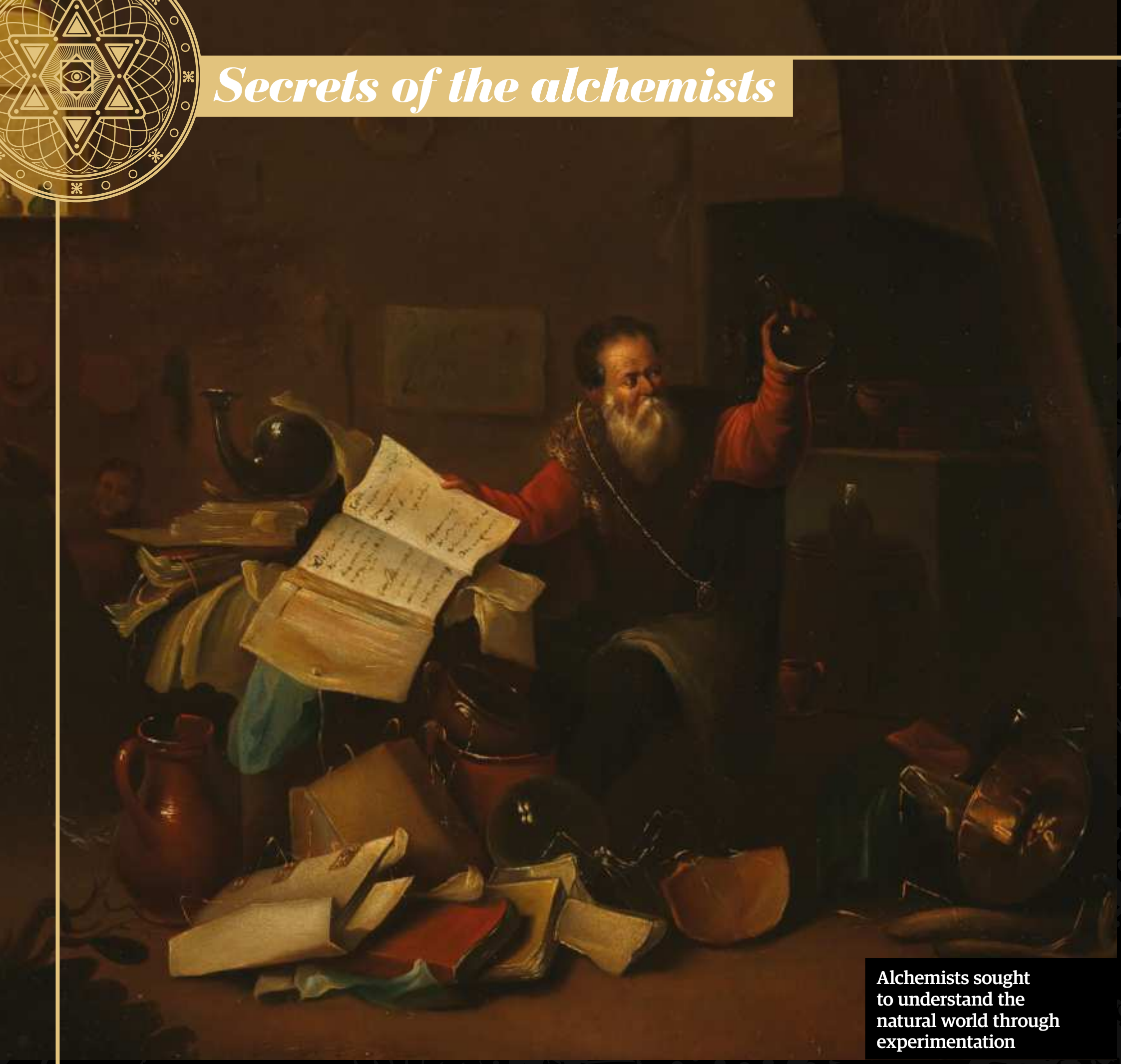
The black crow is symbolic of a particular process in alchemy

1610
J. Champagne inv. del.
Omnia · ab · uno · et · in · unum · omnia



An alchemical adept carrying the vase of Hermes on which is inscribed, "Let us go to seek the nature of the four elements"

> "These components were special substances in a pure state with magical qualities"



Alchemists sought to understand the natural world through experimentation

the failures of others did not stop the alchemists, especially at a time when the supposed success stories achieved a legendary status that carried a lot more weight than the numerous average practitioners who simply faded into obscurity over time after years without success.

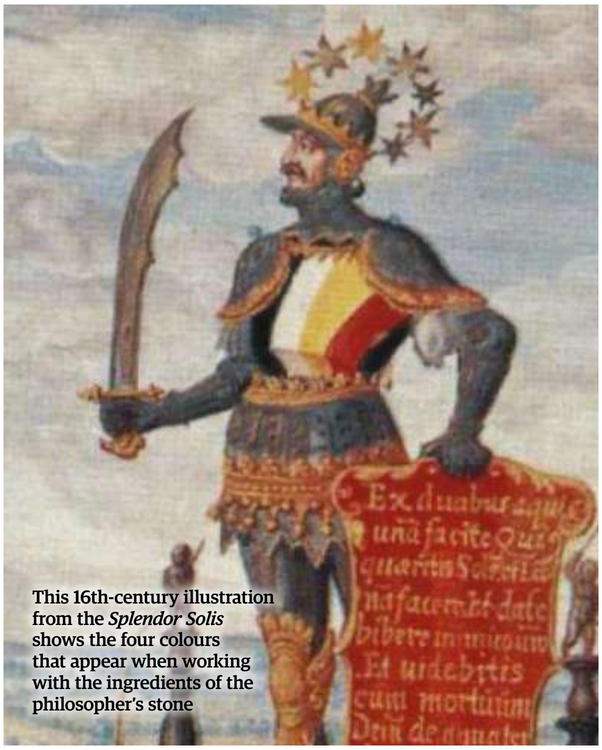
The Medieval alchemists who still focused on the quest either attempted to interpret the substantial corpus of texts, or conducted their own experiments in a laboratory. The heating of metals and other substances was a fundamental part of their work; therefore, the furnace was the core to the alchemist's laboratory. This work area was also filled with many different types of utensils, tools and other equipment, such as beakers, crucibles, flasks, phials, jars, pestles and mortars, ladles, strainers and filters. As the alchemists worked hard in order to achieve their impossible goals, they constantly made improvements to the various apparatus that they used. Centuries later, much of this same equipment was incredibly important to the first chemists, and could often be found in their laboratories as well.

> "There were those who did gain fame or notoriety for their alchemical exploits"

Materials and methods

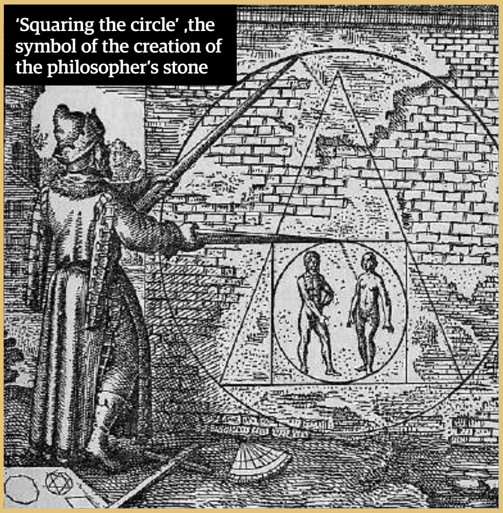
For the practical alchemists, many different methods and a wide range of equipment were essential

All alchemists frequently used their furnaces to heat metals and other substances, but they also literally tried to test every single other process they could think of, some of which seem quite absurd today. This was primarily due to their lack of understanding about the true nature of metals. For instance, Geber believed that matter could be changed into its perfect form by mixing it with a pure, perfect substance. Essentially, alchemists considered this method as the fermentation of gold by leavening it with base metals in order to achieve their goal. Other common processes used were pulverisation, solidification, distillation, sublimation, mortification and calcination. The furnace fire was used for methods like calcination, which broke down solid substances into powder, but heat was not always utilised. Alchemists distilled many different types of liquids in their experiments, such as vinegar, egg yolks and even horse manure. Acid was also commonly used in the laboratory to dissolve ingredients like silver and mercury. And outside of the laboratory, some alchemists hoped to achieve their goal by exposing their work to the Sun for long periods of time. Alchemists did acknowledge at times that there were limits to what they could accomplish. One example is that experts knew they could not simply change a dead thing into a living thing. On the other hand, alchemists did believe that if they returned the dead item into its original form as simple matter first, it was then possible for it to be changed into its opposite form (that is, living).



This 16th-century illustration from the *Splendor Solis* shows the four colours that appear when working with the ingredients of the philosopher's stone

Page from a 17th-century book by Descartes – early science owed much to alchemical work

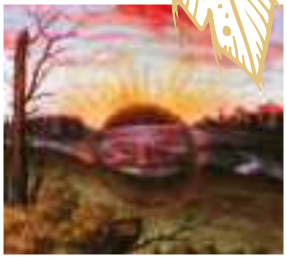


‘Squaring the circle’ ,the symbol of the creation of the philosopher’s stone

Secrets and symbols

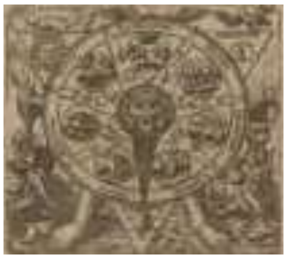
To ensure knowledge was kept from the unworthy, manuscripts were filled with symbols and codes

The Dark Sun



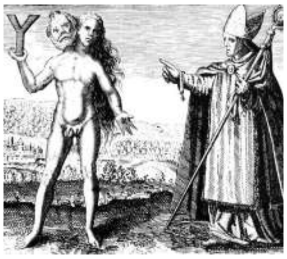
One of the lesser-known alchemical symbols, the Dark Sun, or sol niger, is symbolic of change, essential to the goals of transmutation that alchemists worked towards. It can also be linked to the blackening of matter, or even putrefaction. This image is from the *Splendor Solis*, a 16th-century German book of colourful watercolour images with symbolic significance, relating to alchemical processes and ideas. Though the images date from later in alchemy’s Medieval history, their style is reminiscent of much earlier alchemical images.

The Four Elements

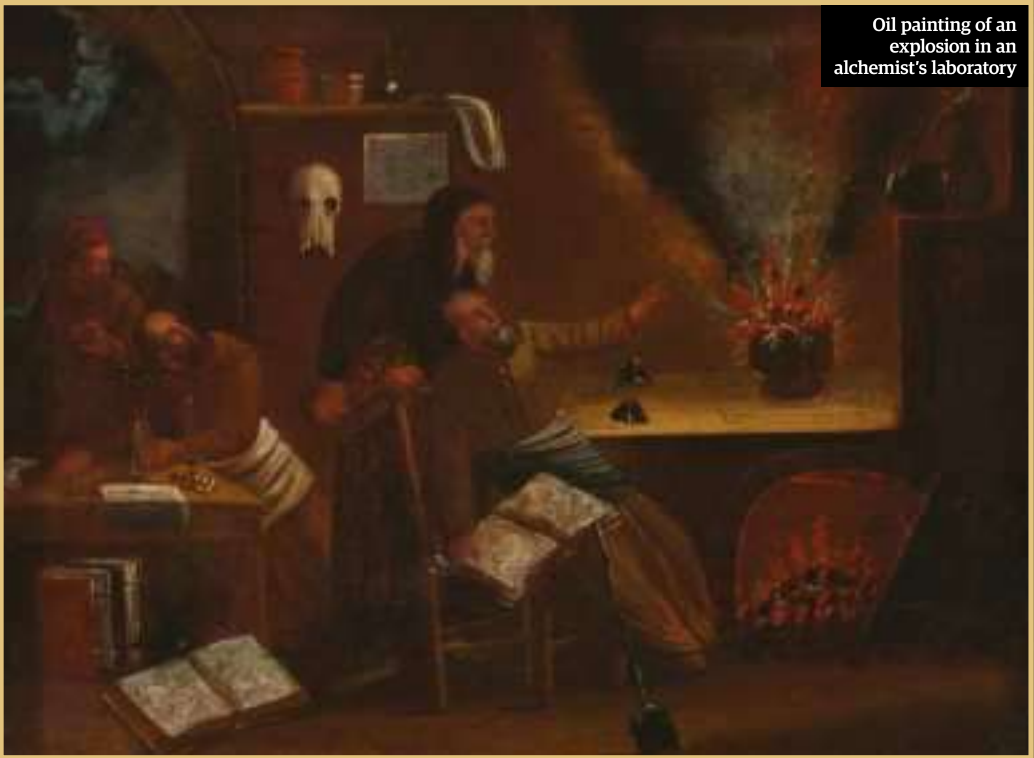


This symbolic emblem from the 17th century shows the four key elements – air, water, earth and fire – at its edges. Alchemists believed that if they could master the different aspects of the four elements, they could create whatever they wished to make, including gold and the elixir of life. The triangle within these corners symbolise the ‘tria prima’ or three primes, which were mercury, sulphur and salt. The alchemist Paracelsus believed that combinations of these three substances made up all metals.

The Great Hermaphrodite



An engraving from the 17th-century work *Symbola Aureae Mensae* by Michael Maier, which depicts Albertus Magnus pointing to the alchemical symbol of the hermaphrodite. The image expresses a common idea found in many alchemical texts that everything has both a uniting, singular nature, but is comprised of two parts. Alchemists believed that harmonisation of these opposing forces (such as wet and dry, Sun and Moon, male and female) could hold the key to the power of creation they sought. The hermaphrodite symbolises this union.



Oil painting of an explosion in an alchemist’s laboratory

Alchemy remained very popular and indeed respectable well into the Renaissance, with many other important individuals emerging on the scene, including Arnald of Villanova and Ramon Llull in the 13th century, George Ripley and Thomas Norton in the 15th century, and then Thomas Charnock in the 16th century, to name just a few. However, during the beginning of the early modern era, the art gradually began to lose its prestige.

Advancements in metallurgy that led to the discovery of the true nature of metals was one of the first causes, followed by many other scientific breakthroughs, which over time made so-called pseudo-sciences like alchemy and astrology obsolete. By the 17th century, Newton was at the forefront of this new scientific age, yet even a forward thinker such as him looked back upon and used the ancient knowledge of alchemy in order to uncover the secrets of life.

Enlightenment and occultism

Enlightenment was not the triumph of rationality over religion and superstition

Written by Derek Wilson

Not until 1865 did the word 'Enlightenment' come into being to describe certain 18th-century philosophical developments. Moreover, it was originally a term of disapprobation, implying 'shallow and pretentious intellectualism'. The relationship between religion, occultism and science was much more complex than the supposed banishing of all other forms of traditional knowledge and belief by empiricism (i.e. what can be proved by observation and calculation). For example, Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), the greatest scientific genius before Einstein, wrote more extensively about the Second Coming of Christ than he did about gravity, and Robert Boyle (1629-1691), the 'father of modern chemistry', left money in his will for 'annual lectures to be delivered for the defence of Christianity against atheism and other "errors".' We also need to bear in mind that the major intellectual developments of the period from the early 17th to the late 18th centuries were the result not only of remarkably gifted thinkers, but also of major politico-religious movements in what was a very troubled period of European history. That period began with the Thirty Years' War on the Continent and the Civil War in Britain. It included religious revival movements on both sides of the Atlantic. It ended with the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars.

> Most scholars identify Newton as an Antitrinitarian monotheist - he rejected the doctrine of the Trinity

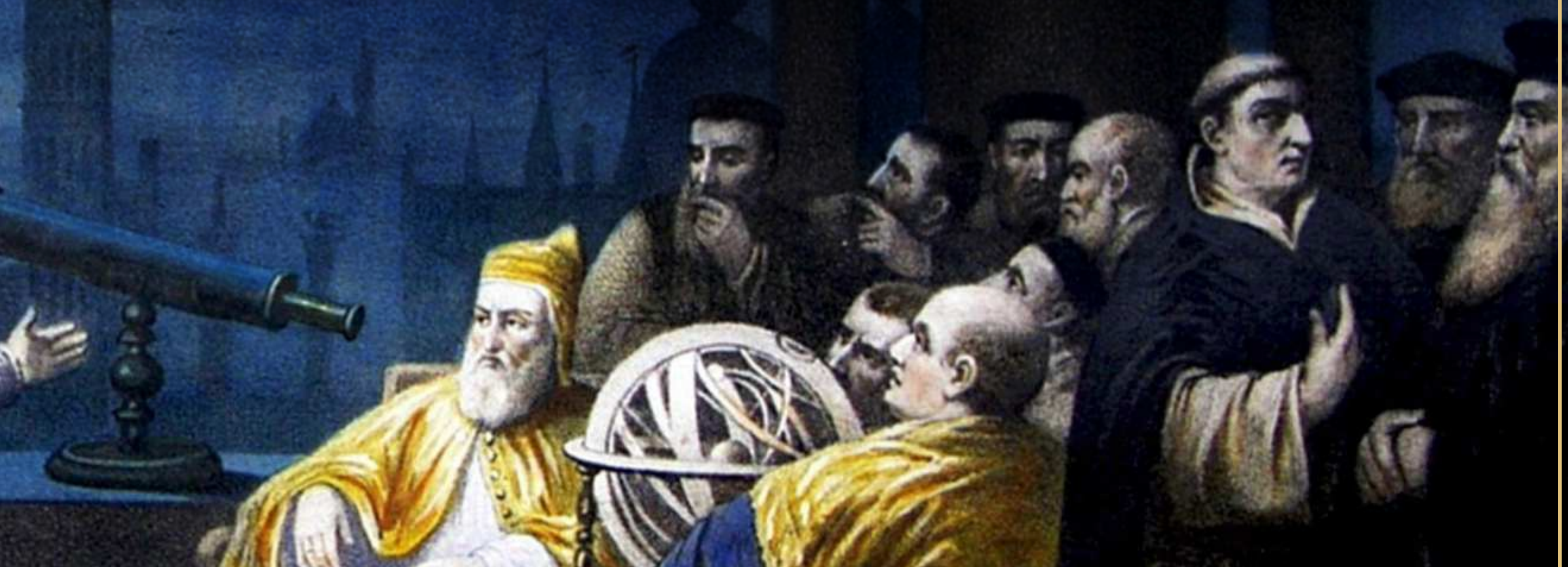
Let us begin in 1633 with the incident often represented as the beginning of the clash between 'religion and science', the papal condemnation of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). The Italian had long since embraced Copernicus's heliocentric theory - that the Earth moves round the Sun. Copernicus had demonstrated this mathematically, but Galileo had confirmed it by means of observations using his newly developed telescope. Traditionalists rejected heliocentrism because they were wedded to the long-established physics laid down by the 4th century BCE philosopher, Aristotle and because various Bible references described the movements of heavenly bodies as they appeared from Earth. We still think of the Sun as 'rising' in the East and 'setting' in the West, even though we know that it is actually our planet that moves. To most of our 17th century ancestors it was perfectly obvious that the Sun did the moving. As for Copernicus's apparent contradiction of the Bible, Galileo agreed with a prominent cardinal who observed, 'the Bible teaches us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go'.

All this would have remained within the realm of scholarly debate had not the pope come down firmly on the side of the traditionalists. He threw the weight of the Church behind the Aristotelian view. What was at stake, therefore, was not a theory of astrophysics, but the authority of the pope. For over 100 years the Catholic church had been under siege from Protestants and other heretics who challenged various aspects of belief and practice. In response, Rome became steadily more obdurate, buttressing its understanding of truth with the threat of condemnation and punishment by the Inquisition. Under these circumstances many church officials who might otherwise have been ready to give Galileo a hearing fell into line with the official Roman verdict. Some of them even refused to look through Galileo's telescope, believing that it must be some kind of magic device designed to seduce them from the truth.

Then, in 1623, Galileo had what seemed to be a stroke of luck. One of his own friends became pope as Urban VIII. He studied Galileo's arguments and instructed him to write a book describing the scholarly debate. The pope made two stipulations: Galileo was only to present heliocentrism as a possible theory. He was also to ensure that Urban's own position was clearly represented. Galileo, therefore, wrote *A Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*. As the title suggests, the subject was presented as a discussion between a wise Copernican, 'Salviati', and a stupid, obscurantist Aristotelian, 'Simplicio'. It was through the mouth of Simplicio that the author presented Urban's arguments. The pope was furious. He summoned the old man (now in his 70s) back to Rome to face a charge of disobedience. He was found guilty, though three of his judges refused to sign the indictment. He was obliged to confess publicly that he believed everything taught by holy church. He was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment (which would likely have killed him off quickly) but this was commuted to house arrest in his own home.

About the time that Galileo was clashing with ecclesiastical authority in Italy, on the other side of the Alps a conflict of altogether more terrifying and wide-ranging proportions was taking place. Between about 1626 and 1631 parts of Germany were in the grip of witch mania. Sporadic outbreaks of persecution were not uncommon in both Catholic and Protestant territories. An earlier one in Bonn was describe by a contemporary in these words:

"There must be half the city implicated for already professors, law students, pastors, canons, vicars and monks have been arrested and burned. … The chancellor and his wife and the private secretary's wife are already executed. … Students and boys of noble birth of nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen



Galileo shows his telescope to the Doge Leonardo Donato

Demons dance in this genre painting by David Rijckaert the Younger *fourteen years have been burned. In fine, things are in such a pitiful state that one does not know with what people one may talk and associate."*

Witch mania is an example of a historical phenomenon that repeats itself over and again in all societies. We might call it the 'them' prejudice. People suffering misfortune frequently look for a scapegoat; the problem is the fault of 'them'. 'Them' may be the Jews, the government, the communists, the EU, foreign immigrants – whoever happens to be the current focus of community or national hatred. In the confusion and terror engendered by the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), hundreds of towns and cities were destroyed. Farmland was trampled by foraging armies. Millions died from disease and starvation as well as military combat. Germany lost a quarter of its population. With such manifest evils stalking the land it is not altogether surprising that sufferers looked for scapegoats and sought to purge their communities of them.

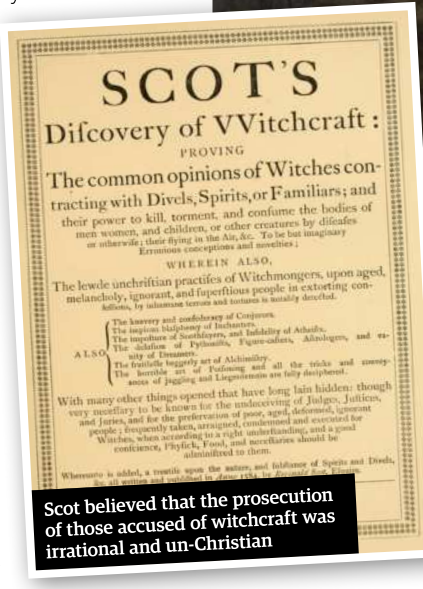
Folklore provided lurid descriptions of black magicians and their activities. It was widely believed that Satan summoned witches and wizards to attend 'sabats', where blasphemous travesties of Christian worship were enacted and sacrifices were offered. Those called to such assemblies flew through the air to be present. None of this had any part in Christian doctrine but, since the Bible endorsed belief in spiritual conflict between the powers of good and evil, little, if anything, was done by church authorities to challenge such stories. Among the intelligentsia opinions were divided. Some men of science, such as Robert Boyle, accepted the common conviction that witches existed and were in league with the devil. But there was a growing scepticism, not only about the more bizarre accounts of occult activity, but also about the very existence of witchcraft. Samuel Harsnett (1561-1631), a cleric who eventually rose to be Archbishop of York, wrote a treatise condemning clergy who carried out exorcisms. He gave it as his opinion that people who "have their brains baited and their fancies distempered with the imaginations and apprehensions of Witches, Conjurors, and Fairies, and all that Lymphatical Chimera, I find to be marshalled in one of these five ranks: Children, Fools, Women, Cowards, sick or black melancholic discomposed wits."

Other critics, while debunking the more lurid accounts of occult activity, were cautious about declaring that witchcraft did not actually exist. Not only were they anxious to avoid being tarred as heretics, they also did not want to be seen as at odds with the law, for most European states had anti-witchcraft legislation in place.

Then again, the prevailing philosophical framework in which post-Renaissance debate took place made it difficult for radical thinkers to deny the possibility of magic. Neo-Platonic metaphysics taught the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual realms and sought ways of harnessing the powers latent in the cosmos. It took the better part of two centuries for a new rationale regarding the occult to become firmly established among the leaders of society and to bring all witchcraft prosecutions to an end.

The laying of a new philosophical ground plan was undertaken by thinkers trying to arrive at a logically acceptable concept of God in a Europe where Catholics and Protestants were zealously slaughtering each other. As early as 1584, a down-to-earth Kentish gentleman called Reginald Scot had debunked the whole idea of malevolent magical powers on religious grounds. In his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* he argued that an

Matthew Hopkins, the Witchfinder General, may have been responsible for the deaths of hundreds of women



SCOT'S

Diſcovery of VVitchcraft:

PROVING

The common opinions of Witches contracting with Divels, Spirits, or Familiars; and their power to kill, torment, and conſume the bodies of men women, and children, or other creatures by diſeaſes or otherwiſe; their flying in the Air, &c. To be but imaginary Erronious conceptions and novelties;

WHEREIN ALSO,

The lewde unchriſtian practiſes of Witchmongers, upon aged, melancholy, ignorant, and ſuperſtitious people in extorting confeſſions, by inhumane terrors and tortures is notably detected.

ALSO
- The knavery and confederacy of Conjurors.
- The impious blaſphemy of Inchanters.
- The impoſture of Soothſayers, and Infidelity of Atheiſts.
- The deluſion of Pythoniſts, Figure-caſters, Aſtrologers, and vanity of Dreamers.
- The fruitleſſe beggerly art of Alchimiſtry.
- The horrible art of Poiſoning and all the tricks and conveyances of juggling and Liegerdemain are fully deciphered.

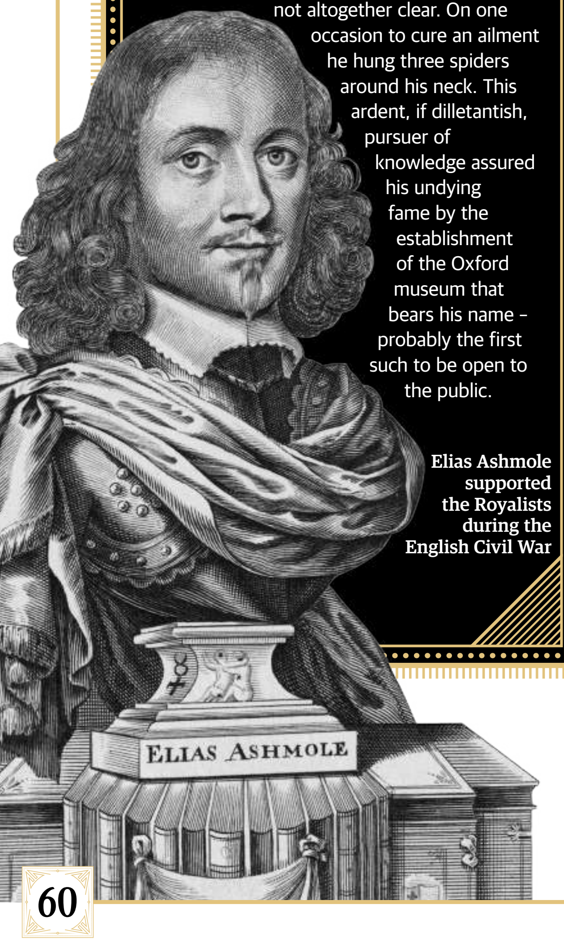
With many other things opened that have long lain hidden: though very neceſſary to be known for the undeceiving of Judges, Juſtices, and Juries, and for the preſervation of poor, aged, deformed, ignorant people; frequently taken, arraigned, condemned and executed for Witches, when according to a right underſtanding, and a good conſcience, Phyſick, Food, and neceſſaries ſhould be adminiſtred to them.

Whereunto is added, a treatiſe upon the nature, and ſubſtance of Spirits and Divels, &c: all written and publiſhed in *Anno* 1584, by *Reginald Scot*, Eſquire.

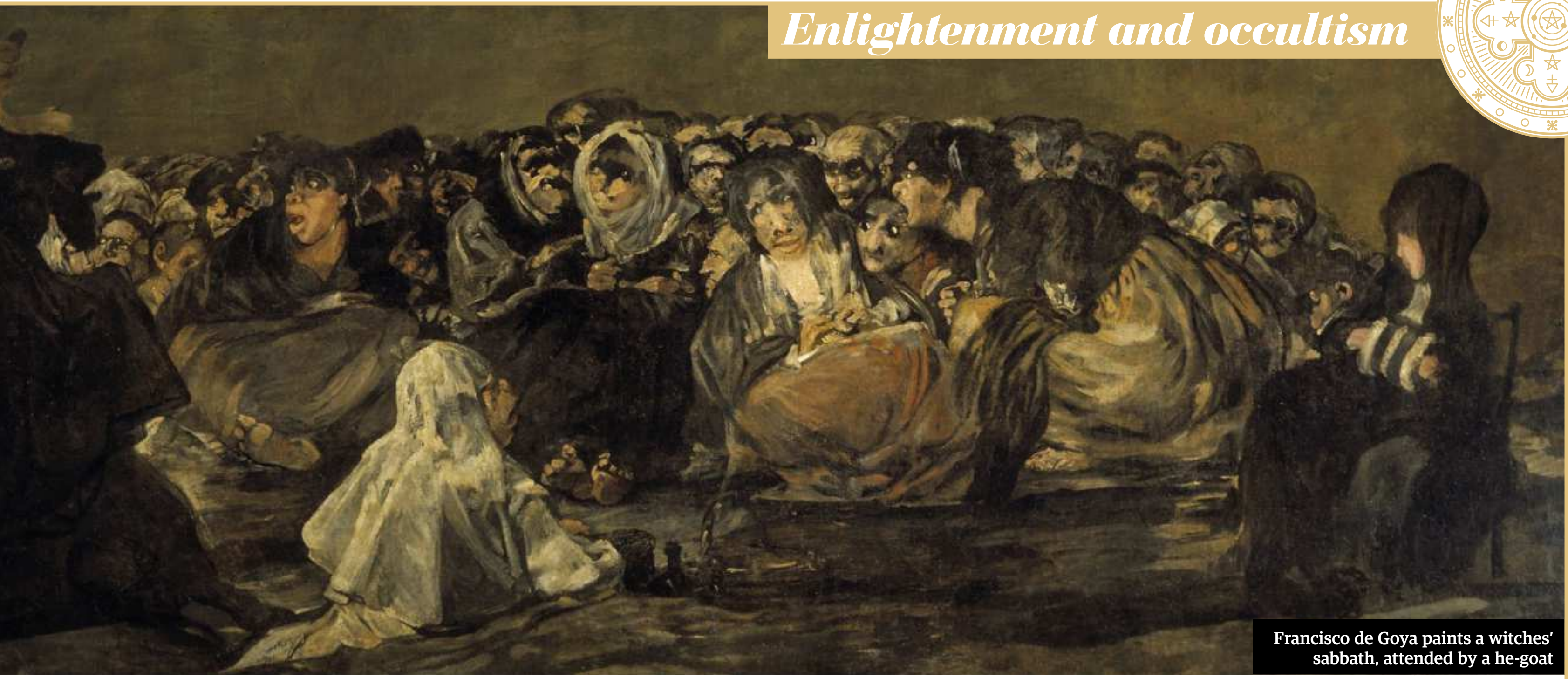
Scot believed that the prosecution of those accused of witchcraft was irrational and un-Christian

Elias Ashmole

Elias Ashmole (1617-1692) was an example of the educated Englishman whose tastes were Catholic and who cannot, therefore, be pigeon-holed as a friend or enemy of the occult. There were many such. He went to London in 1633, became a solicitor and applied himself assiduously to building a fortune by cultivating the right people. He supported Charles I during the Civil War and joined the royal court in Oxford. There he took the opportunity to extend his education and his wide-ranging studies embraced mathematics, physics, astrology, alchemy and magic. Ashmole was a staunch Church of England man who held all nonconformists in contempt, but he became a Freemason in 1646 and he probably also flirted with Rosicrucianism. When designing his coat of arms he surmounted the shield with an image of the god Mercury supported by figues representing the twin constellation Gemini. His chosen motto, 'Ex Uno Omnia' (All comes from the One), indicated his fascination with the Hermetic tradition. Court favour and financially advantageous marriages enabled him to amass a huge collection of books, prints, coins, medals and curios that he bestowed on the University of Oxford, which, in 1669, awarded him a doctorate in Medicine. How far his own knowledge merited this accolade is not altogether clear. On one occasion to cure an ailment he hung three spiders around his neck. This ardent, if dilletantish, pursuer of knowledge assured his undying fame by the establishment of the Oxford museum that bears his name – probably the first such to be open to the public.



Elias Ashmole supported the Royalists during the English Civil War



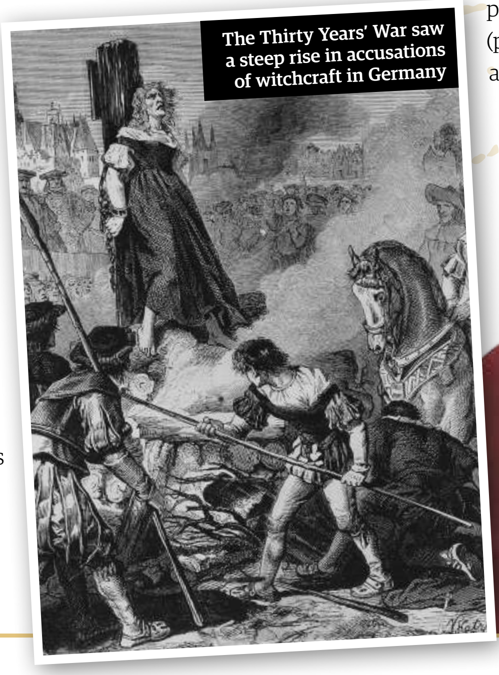
Francisco de Goya paints a witches' sabbath, attended by a he-goat

all-powerful God would not allow any human agent to exercise spiritual powers. Witches, Scot claimed, belonged to one of four categories: Some were innocent victims of malevolent neighbours; Some were self-deluded; Some were deliberate fraudsters, making money from phoney charms and potions; The rest were genuine - that is, they sought to inflict harm by supernatural means but any success they achieved was attributable to chance or to sinister means, such as poison or what we would now call auto-suggestion. Scot's scepticism gradually gained ground among thinking people. What is surprising, from a modern viewpoint, is that it took so long.

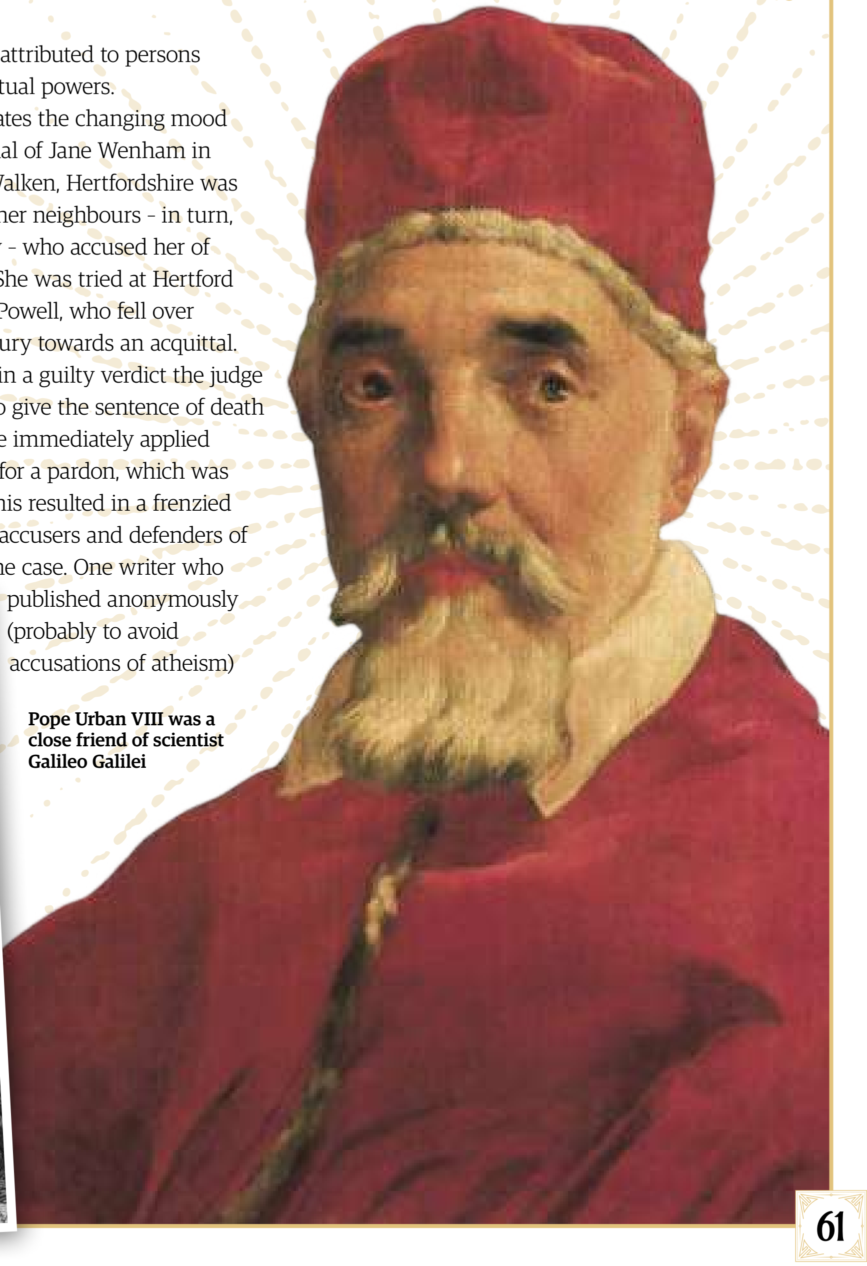
In the 17th century a new brand of philosophers emerged who applied their own kind of solvents to the common belief in black magic. Men like René Descartes (1596-1650), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) were all pondering the existence and nature of God and coming to very different conclusions. The common ground they shared was a 'mechanistic' concept of the universe. However it came into being, it operated according to strict rules. Those rules were informative about the one who devised them (if, indeed, such a being existed). One by-product of this understanding of the cosmos was that it could not be changed from within - that is to say that no human being can manipulate it, perform miracles or cast effective spells. In other words, there are no such things as witches or wizards or cunning men or whatever fanciful name might be claimed by or attributed to persons thought to possess spiritual powers.

"There was a growing scepticism… about the very existence of witchcraft"

Nothing better illustrates the changing mood of the times than the trial of Jane Wenham in 1712. Jane, a widow of Walken, Hertfordshire was denounced by some of her neighbours - in turn, egged on by local clergy - who accused her of various malicious acts. She was tried at Hertford Assizes before Sir John Powell, who fell over backwards to steer the jury towards an acquittal. When the jury brought in a guilty verdict the judge had no alternative but to give the sentence of death by hanging. However, he immediately applied to the Crown in person for a pardon, which was immediately granted. This resulted in a frenzied pamphlet war between accusers and defenders of the clergy involved in the case. One writer who published anonymously (probably to avoid accusations of atheism)



The Thirty Years' War saw a steep rise in accusations of witchcraft in Germany



Pope Urban VIII was a close friend of scientist Galileo Galilei pointed out that human beings were able to change the 'rules' governing nature, but certainly not by invoking demons.

"Not only our witchcrafts have been banished, but all arts and sciences have been greatly improved. Our buildings are much more beautiful and commodious and yet more cheaply built and easier kept in repair. Our gardens and orchards are stocked with new and nobler fruits and fields and woods with useful trees. Many of our lands that were almost useless are loaded with new kinds of grass and roots, by better understanding the improvement of the soil … Physic and surgery are new moulded and improved, for the lengthening out of life in ease … The farthest planets are brought near and their motions wonderfully accounted for … All arts are improved, God is seen and admired in his works, and the honour of religion no ways lessened."

(A Letter from a Physician in Hertfordshire to his Friend in London)

That vision of a Utopian world might not have convinced everyone who read it, but it did make the point that humanity could abandon magic without abandoning God. England was one of the first nations to put an end to witchcraft trials. Though unofficial lynchings did sometimes occur, the last legal conviction took place in 1716. It would be another 66 years before the last European state (Switzerland) abandoned witchcraft prosecutions.

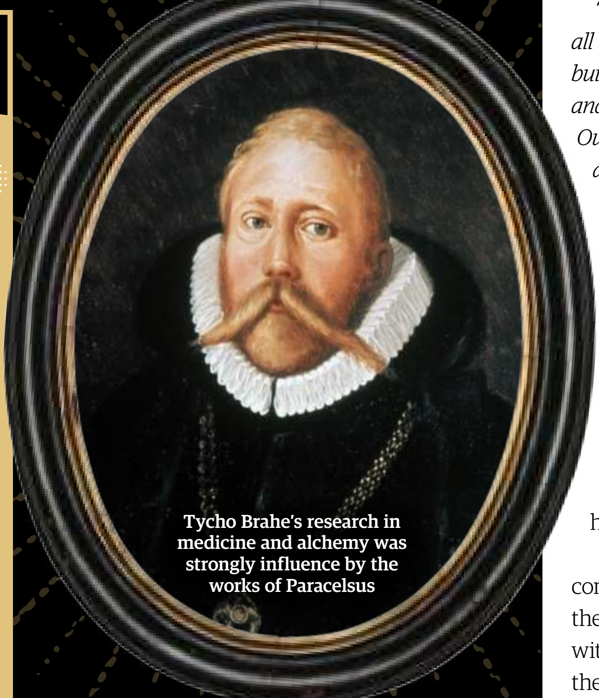
The author of 'A Letter from a Physician' cited the diffusion of scientific knowledge as a fundamental reason for the overcoming of superstition and the greater wellbeing of society. There was much truth in this assertion. One of the hidden revolutions that took place in the second half of the 17th century was that education became fashionable. Between the end of the Thirty Years' War and the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars, Europe enjoyed a century and a half of relative peace. This enabled the more affluent members of society to concentrate on acquiring the arts of civilised living. This was the age of the Grand Tour. The scions of wealthy English families were despatched to the Continent for three years or so to learn foreign languages, discover foreign cultures and study with some of the leading intellectuals of the age. The more inquisitive and acquisitive travellers returned with cartloads (sometimes shiploads) of souvenirs - paintings, sculptures, books, various scientific specimens - with which to adorn their mansions and impress their friends.

A parallel development was the foundation of academies where gentlemen of leisure met to discuss all aspects of science and the arts. In 1635 the Parisian Academy was established and, in 1666, this developed into the French Academy of Sciences. In 1662 the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge came into being

"People were ready to believe anything"

Horoscopes

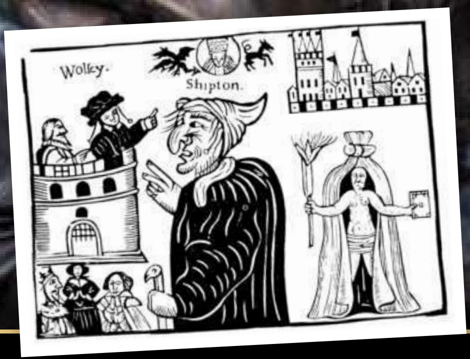
Having a horoscope prepared by an astrologer was a luxury that only the wealthy could afford – until the spread of printed periodicals. Canny publishers realised that a huge market existed among people who wanted predictions about their future or advice on the most propitious time to undertake a venture. They began to produce almanacs and it is calculated that, by 1650, over 400,000 of these cheap handbooks were being sold annually in England. Almanacs provided a variety of information, from important dates to medical advice; from astronomical details to predictions. They varied in quality. Some were produced by leading astronomers/astrologers, such as the Danish scholar Tycho Brahe. Others were catchpenny, sensationalist offerings deliberately exploiting the gullible. It was almanacs that now made popular the predictions of ancient soothsayers. The legendary prophecies of Merlin, written in the 12th century by Geoffrey of Monmouth, were retold and made to apply to current or imminent events, as were the sayings of Mother Shipton, a 16th century Yorkshire soothsayer. The most famous seer was the French physician and astrologer, Nostradamus (1503-1566), a serious scholar who, from his study of many ancient texts as well as the apocalyptic books of the Bible, made obscurely worded predictions that readers turned to eagerly to discover what fate had in store for them. In such a turbulent era people were ready to believe anything.



Tycho Brahe's research in medicine and alchemy was strongly influenced by the works of Paracelsus

TAURUS
ARIES
SAGITTARIUS

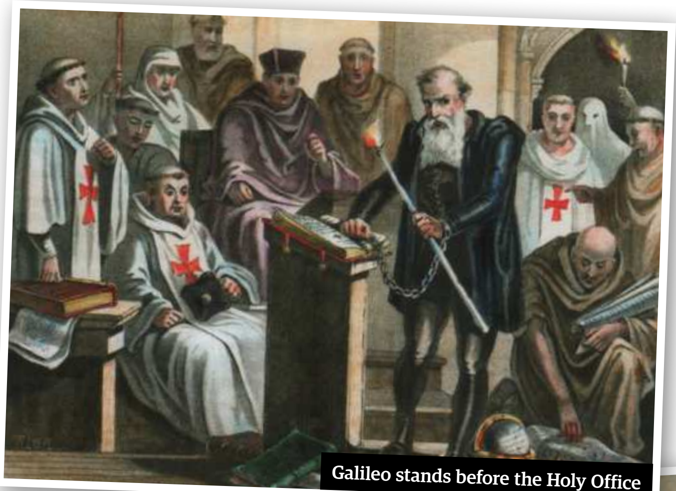
This statue of Mother Shipton stands in Knaresborough town centre



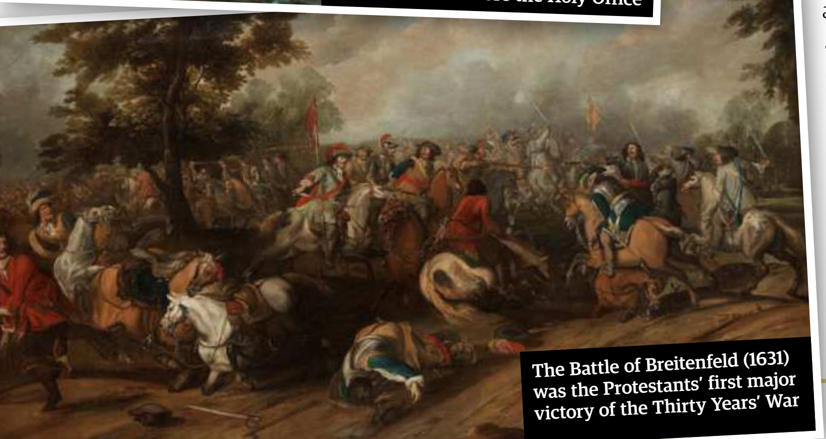
and, as the name indicates, it enjoyed active royal patronage from the new king, Charles II. Similar learned bodies were set up in Berlin and other European centres. Here members delivered lectures, debated and performed experiments. They wrote reports of their proceedings, which were circulated to other members of this intellectual elite throughout Europe.

But such societies did not only exist in major cities. Leaders of rural society who liked to think of themselves as cultured set up regional debating societies. For example, in 1710 certain Lincolnshire gentlemen and clergy established The Society of Gentlemen for the Supporting of Mutual Benevolence and Their Improvement in the Liberal Sciences and in Polite Learning. Among those invited to address its meetings were Sir Isaac Newton, Sir Hans Sloane (the president of the Royal Society, whose collection later formed the nucleus of the British Museum), the Rev William Stukeley (an antiquarian and celebrated archaeological pioneer of both the Stonehenge and Avebury excavations), and the poets Alexander Pope and John Gay. Also significant is the fact that among the Spalding Society's founder members was the Rector of Epworth, one Samuel Wesley, father of John and Charles Wesley, the founders of the Methodist movement.

> The Royal Society's motto 'Nullius in verba' is taken to mean 'take nobody's word for it'



Galileo stands before the Holy Office

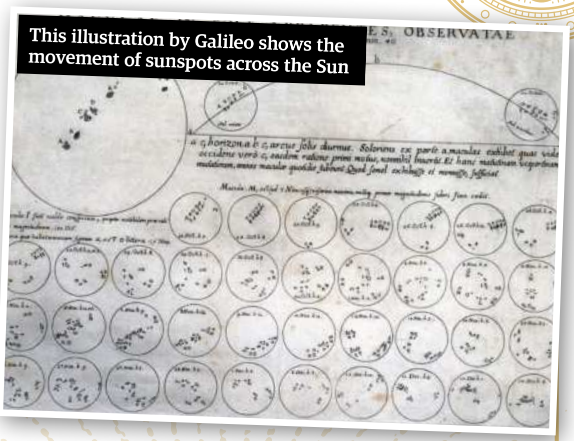


The Battle of Breitenfeld (1631) was the Protestants' first major victory of the Thirty Years' War

We now associate the Wesley brothers with the religious revival of the mid-18th century (together with its sister movement, the 'Great Awakening' led by George Whitefield in North America), but this does not mean that they were ignorant of or anti-pathetic to advances in science. On the contrary; John Wesley avidly read the writings of Robert Boyle, John Locke and Sir Isaac Newton. Of Newton he wrote that he "carried the lamp of knowledge into paths ... that had been unexplored before."

Just as for Wesley there was no gulf between religion and science, so for Newton, who was President of the Royal Society from 1703 to 1727, there was no divide between science, religion and occultism. For this polymath all aspects of the unknown were ripe for investigation. He devoted years to the study of alchemy. Among his voluminous unpublished papers there appear more than 50,000 words on the manufacture of the philosopher's stone, supposedly able to turn base metals into gold. But his investigations went beyond the study of transmutation. He was concerned to know how chemical substances were formed and what they were made of (what we would now call their molecular structure). In pursuit of such knowledge he did not hesitate to communicate with clandestine, pseudo-magical communities frowned upon by the rest of the scientific fraternity. Newton's knowledge of the Bible was prodigious and his approach to theology was just as individualistic as his reflections on 'pure' science. For instance, he abandoned an early resolve to seek ordination because he discovered that he could no longer believe in the Trinity.

Social and political developments in the 18th century were fundamental to changes of attitude regarding the occult. The widening educational gap between upper and lower classes meant that working people in rural communities tended to cling longer to traditional beliefs. This explains, for example, why learned judges and doctors found themselves at odds with the stubborn witch beliefs of simple villagers. But the beginnings of industrialisation changed the demographic of many areas. People were drawn to the cities in search of work and left behind their rural communities and the folklore that lurked therein. This is an underlying reason for the gradual fading of occult beliefs among the lower orders of society.



This illustration by Galileo shows the movement of sunspots across the Sun

Galileo's telescope, c.1610

At the same time, philosophers and their wealthy patrons were directing their thinking away from speculation about the supernatural and towards the solving of political problems. King Louis XV of France (1710-1774) is credited with the prophetic utterance, 'Aprés moi le deluge'. The old order, headed by absolute monarchs like himself, was under threat from revolutionary forces - and from philosophers who challenged the political principles upon which the concept of a semi-divine hereditary monarchy rested.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) were among the leading thinkers who explored the concept of the 'social contract' and the issue of political power. Was it top-down, invested by God in chosen leaders - monarchs and aristocrats - or bottom-up, residing in the people, who had the right to choose their own governors? Radical thinking gave some sort of rationale to revolutionary activists.

In 1776 American colonists severed ties with Britain. In 1789 the French Revolution broke out, King Louis XVI was executed, France became a republic and found itself at war with the other major European powers. The decades of comparative peace were over. The Continent - and, indeed, the world - was entering an entirely new era of warfare. There would be new battles to be fought on the ground and new arguments to be aired in the sanctums of the philosophers.

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Palmistry

You can tell a lot from a person's face, and even more from their hands if you just so happen to be a skilled chirologist...

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

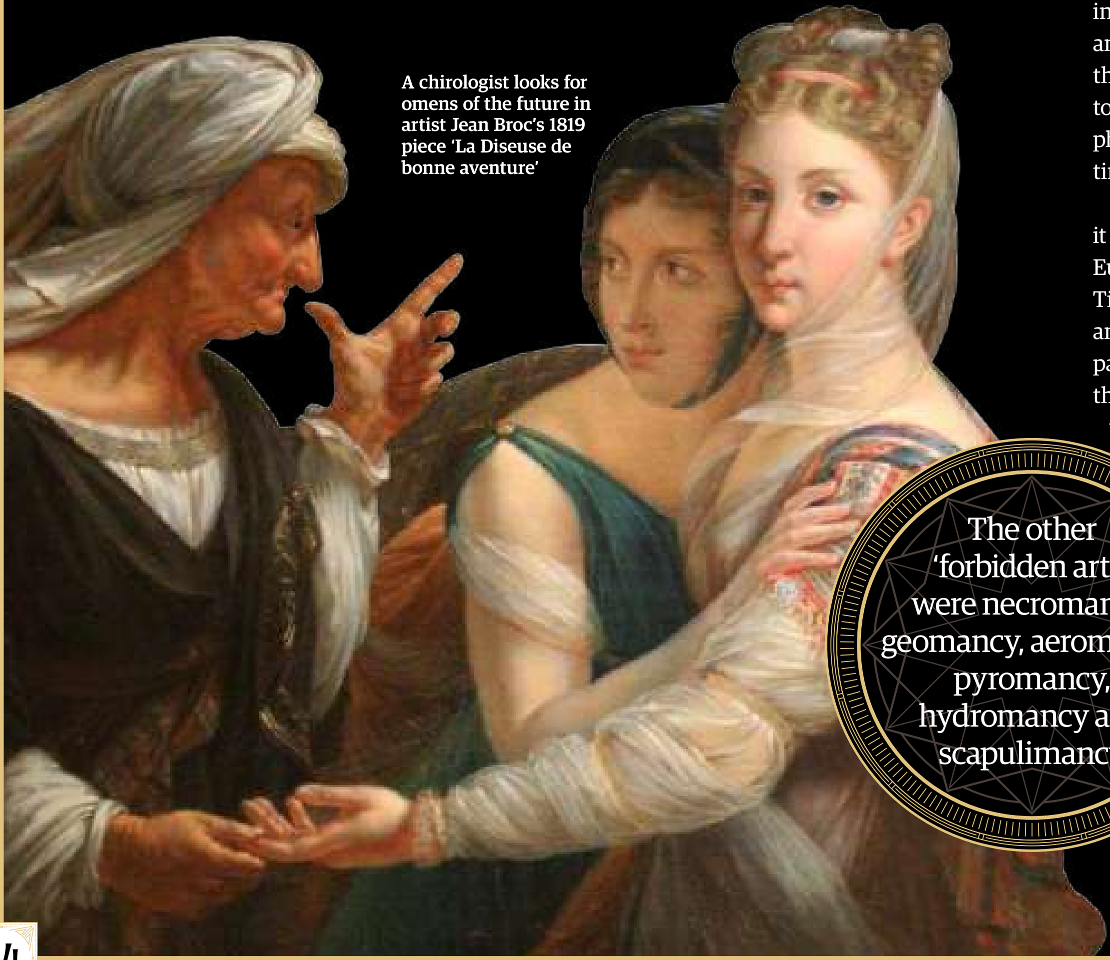
Also known as chiromancy, palmistry is the ancient palm-reading divination practice that is still being used today. Those who practice palmistry are usually called palmists, hand readers, hand analysts or chirologists. Unlike other divinatory arts, interpretations of the palm tend to differ across different schools of palmistry. Add that to the fact that there has always been a big lack of evidence as to whether palmistry predictions are accurate, and you can see why this led to the art being viewed as a pseudoscience by academics.

Through examining palms, chirologists are supposedly able to evaluate a person's character or future life. They look at the lines on the palm and determine what they mean based on their size, quality, and what their intersections look like. Sometimes the divination extends to looking at fingers, hand flexibility, skin patterns, also known as dermatoglyphics, and more. Even a person's hand shape can determined their future, and these are classified by one of four groups: earth (usually broad, with coarse skin), air (square with long fingers), water (long, oval-shaped palm with long fingers), and fire (square, with flushed skin and short fingers).

The main section of a reading, however, is based around the lines found on almost all hands: the heart line, found towards the top of the palm and linked to love and attraction; the head line, starting at the edge of the palm under the index finger and flowing to the other edge, linked to intellectualism, learning and communication style, and knowledge, and the life line, which starts at the end of the palm above the thumb and flows to just above the wrist, and is linked to vitality, physical health and wellbeing and, in ancient times, a person's lifespan.

Though palmistry is practiced all over the world, it has always been most commonly used on the Eurasian landmass, particularly in India, Nepal, Tibet, Persia, China, Sumer, Babylon, Mesopotamia and historic Palestine. Many people believe palmistry began in ancient India and spread from there, but the exact origins of the art are now unknown. However, through moving across countries and cultures, it also developed a lot, especially in ancient Greece.

By medieval times, palmistry was practiced by witch-hunters, who saw uneven pigmentation and black spots on the palm as a sign of making a deal with the Devil. It began to be suppressed by the Catholic Church, which saw it as a pagan superstition. By the Renaissance, it made a comeback in the magical world, but was still classified as a 'forbidden art'.



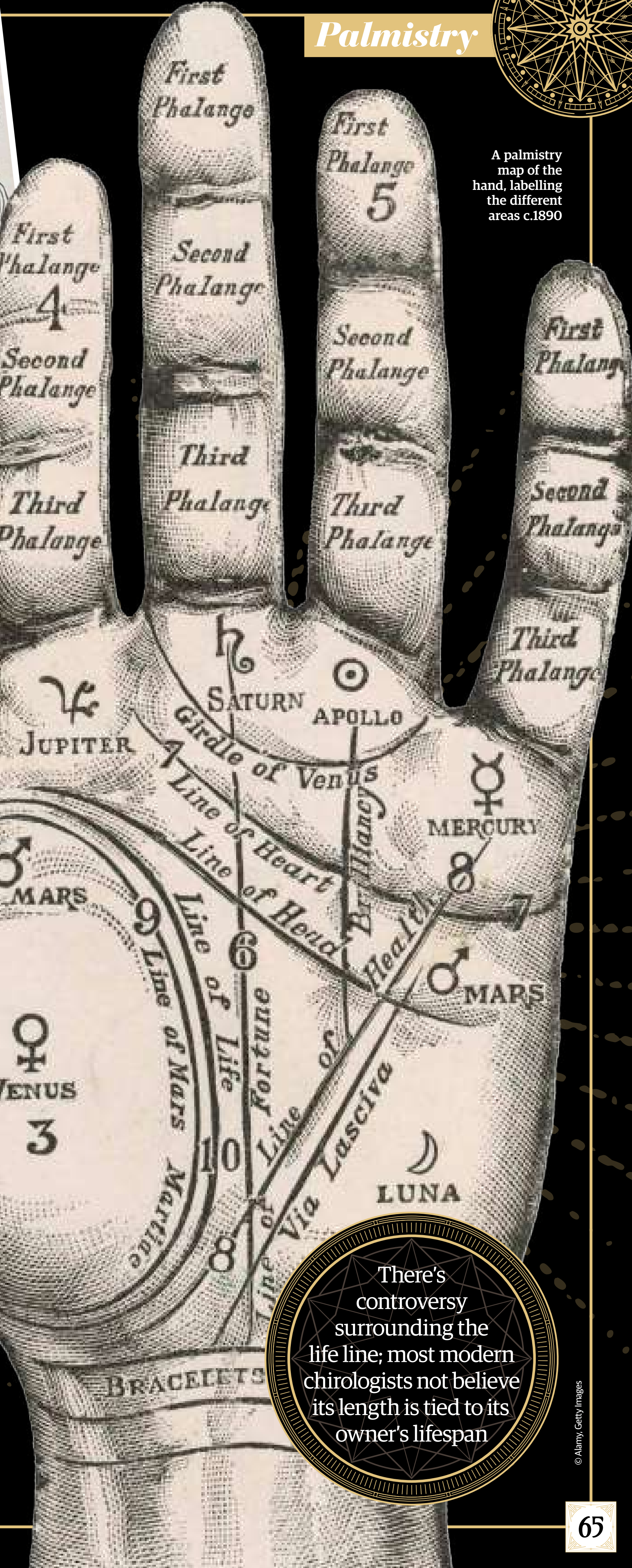
A chirologist looks for omens of the future in artist Jean Broc's 1819 piece 'La Diseuse de bonne aventure'

> The other 'forbidden arts' were necromancy, geomancy, aeromancy, pyromancy, hydromancy and scapulimancy

NOSSO DESTINO ESCRIPTO
NAS NOSSAS MÃOS.
CHIROMANCIA

Madame Brouillard, a famous Portuguese palmist, made her fortune by reading hands

> “Palmists determine what the lines mean based on their size, quality, and what their intersections look like”


First Phalange
Second Phalange
Third Phalange
First Phalange
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5
Second Phalange
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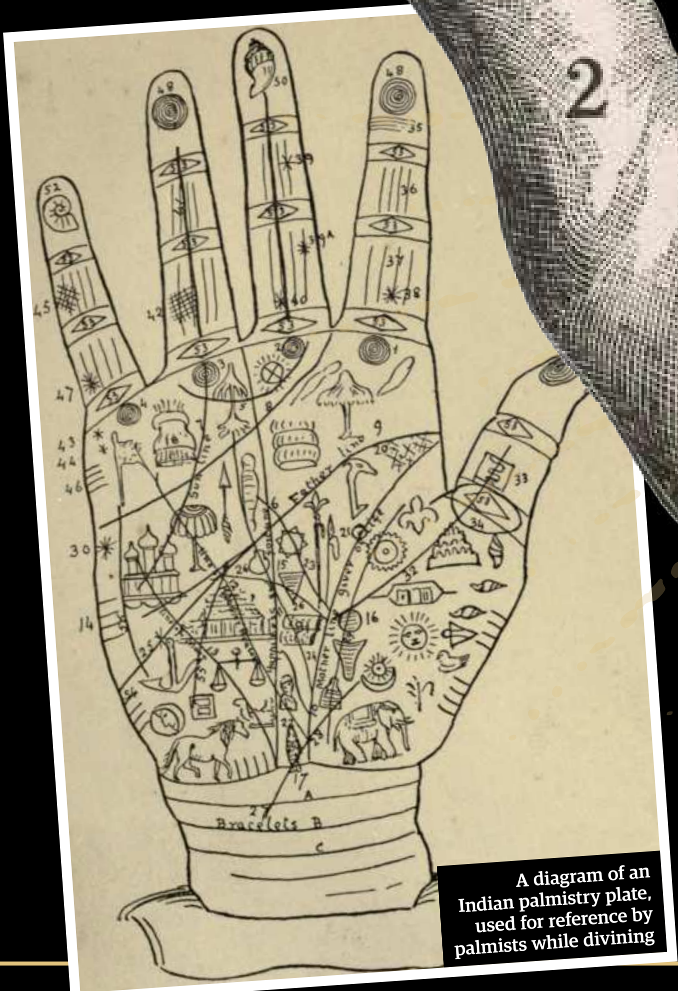
Second Phalange
Third Phalange
1
2
3
JUPITER
SATURN
APOLLO
MERCURY
MARS
MARS
VENUS
LUNA
Girdle of Venus
7 Line of Heart
Line of Head
Line of Brilliancy
Line of Health
8
7
9 Line of Mars
Line of Life
6
Line of Fortune
Line of Via Lasciva
10
8
Martiae
BRACELETS

A palmistry map of the hand, labelling the different areas c.1890

There’s controversy surrounding the life line; most modern chirologists not believe its length is tied to its owner’s lifespan


Father
Bracelets B
A
C

A diagram of an Indian palmistry plate, used for reference by palmists while divining

© Alamy, Getty Images

The ghoul next door

Revered and feared in villages across Europe, cunning folk and their magic were part of everyday life until a new move against witches led many to their deaths

Written by June Woolerton

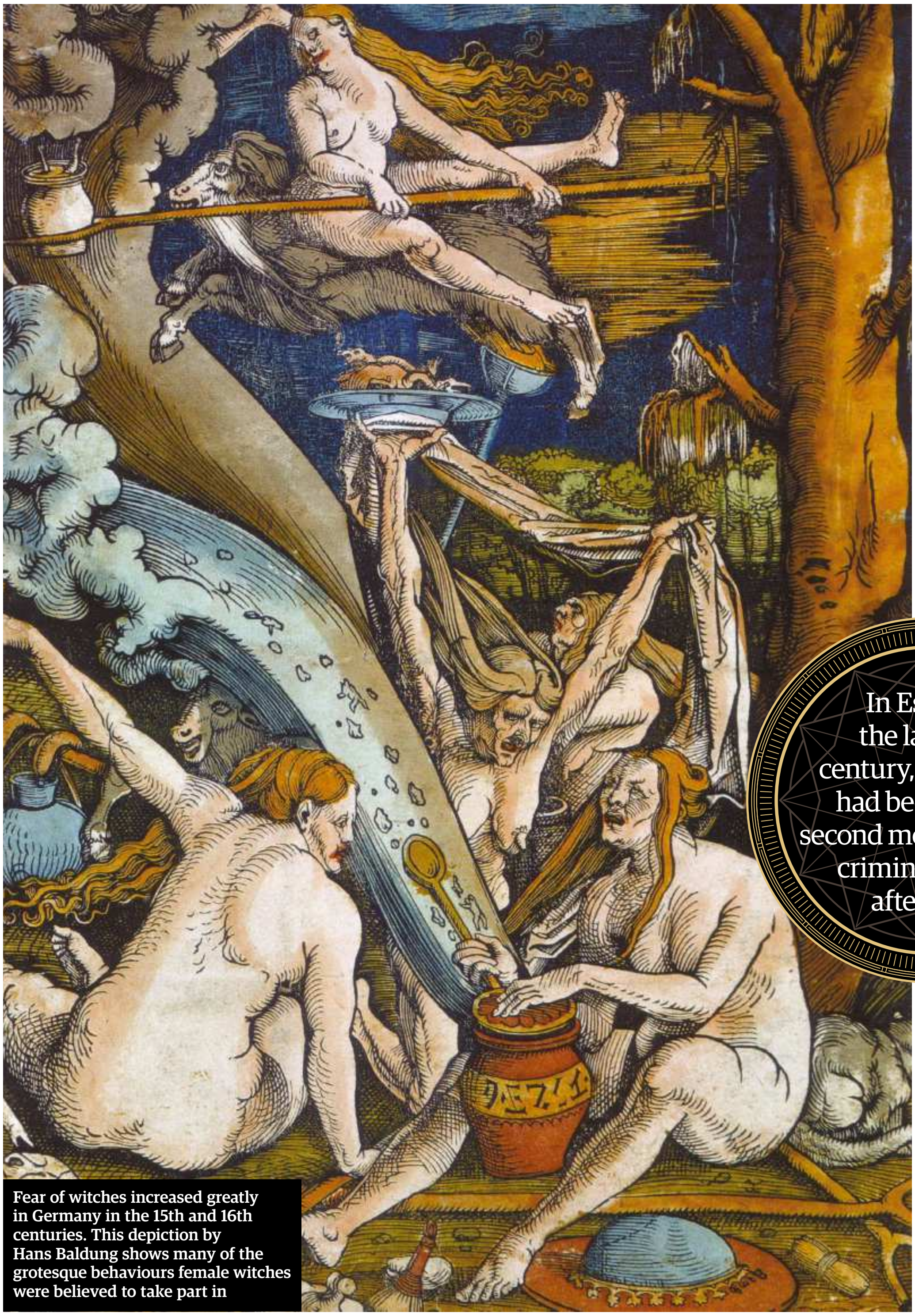
When Issobell Sinclair admitted she had talked to fairies as she tried to protect cattle from harm on Hallowe'en with a sheet and some hair, she sealed her fate. The Scottish woman was hanged as a witch soon after her trial in 1633. But just a century earlier she might have gone unharmed, even unnoticed. For Issobell was following a path that thousands of men and women had taken for centuries. White witches, also called cunning or wise folk, had been an integral part of many God fearing communities since Roman times. They made cures, gave advice and offered protection to people and their livelihoods. But as organised religion changed and fear of witchcraft spread in the 16th and 17th centuries, the thin line between their practices and the darker arts of black witchcraft blurred, and soon the places they had once called home were no place for the ghoul next door.

> Potions made of urine and hair were made for protection against witches, who would suffer pain if the bottle was buried or burned

Magic was so widely practised in Tudor England that leading cleric, Bishop Hugh Latimer, warned openly in 1552 that "a great many of us when we be in trouble, or sickness, or lose anything, we run hither and thither to witches, or sorcerers, whom we call wise men…". Just about everyone knew where to find a witch or cunning person to help them with their problems. It was no different across Europe. The wise folk were a fixture in their communities, inspiring both respect and fear. And in an age when science could offer little explanation for anything, their wisdom held power.

The position was open to anyone although some people were believed to be born with special powers. Seventh sons of seventh sons were said to be able to cure goitre and scrofula. There was also a belief that special powers could be inherited or passed on from one cunning person to their chosen successor. But anyone who wanted to learn magic and was willing to try it could acquire a reputation as one of the cunning folk. The range of people practising magic can be seen in the convictions secured in Rouen in France in 1605 when shepherds, apothecaries and labourers were all found guilty of being witches. The cunning folk came from all walks of life and often lived in the very heart of their communities.

Whether their spells worked wasn't really the issue. Once someone was known as a wise man or woman, they would find themselves consulted on a regular basis. Often they did it for prestige rather than to get rich. Many cunning folk earned very little from their magic and many kept prices low



Fear of witches increased greatly in Germany in the 15th and 16th centuries. This depiction by Hans Baldung shows many of the grotesque behaviours female witches were believed to take part in

to make sure they undercut business rivals. Even when they used their powers for good, cunning folk attracted suspicion and stuck to minimal charges to avoid being accused of fraud or trying to con vulnerable people out of cash. Some refused to take money at all. Ann Jefferies, a teenage servant in Cornwall, fell seriously ill in 1645 and on her recovery said she had been visited by fairies during her sickness. She soon gained a reputation for being able to cure by touch but despite becoming a local celebrity, she always refused payment.

It's no surprise her skills were in such demand. Cunning folk were often consulted for cures for both people and animals. They used spells and charms which held their own against the less-than-sophisticated medicine of the day in terms of popularity. Common practices included mumbling words over the patient or placing scribbled messages on them. Often these derived from old Latin phrases which the witch's mostly illiterate clients couldn't read. Some of the charms contained a form of prayer – Jane Howe from Somerset wrote down some of the methods she knew including one said to stop bleeding which ended by calling for a divine blessing. Curing by touch was popular across Europe as was the use of herbs and plants. Here the white witch's practices were close to traditional medicine which also relied on botanics to cure, but the cunning folk always ascribed their success to magic. And they were always at pains to point out that they had to be involved in the treatment if it was to stand any chance of success.

"What a witch said held sway, and much of their influence came from fear"

Witches were also asked for help in resolving crime, including the return of stolen goods. Sometimes they were reported to do this by showing their clients the image of the criminal in a glass or mirror or by using a crystal ball to identify them. Often, the very knowledge that the local cunning man or woman had been consulted was enough in itself to spur the thief into handing back what had been taken, for their powers, even when used for good, inspired fear. Usually, a condition of helping was that the wrongdoer escaped any punishment. What a white witch said held sway, and much of their influence in the local community came from fear. After all, they were known for their powers which many believed could cure illness and tell the future. No one wanted to be on the receiving end of those skills if they were turned on them in revenge.

In Essex in the late 16th century, witchcraft had become the second most common criminal charge after theft

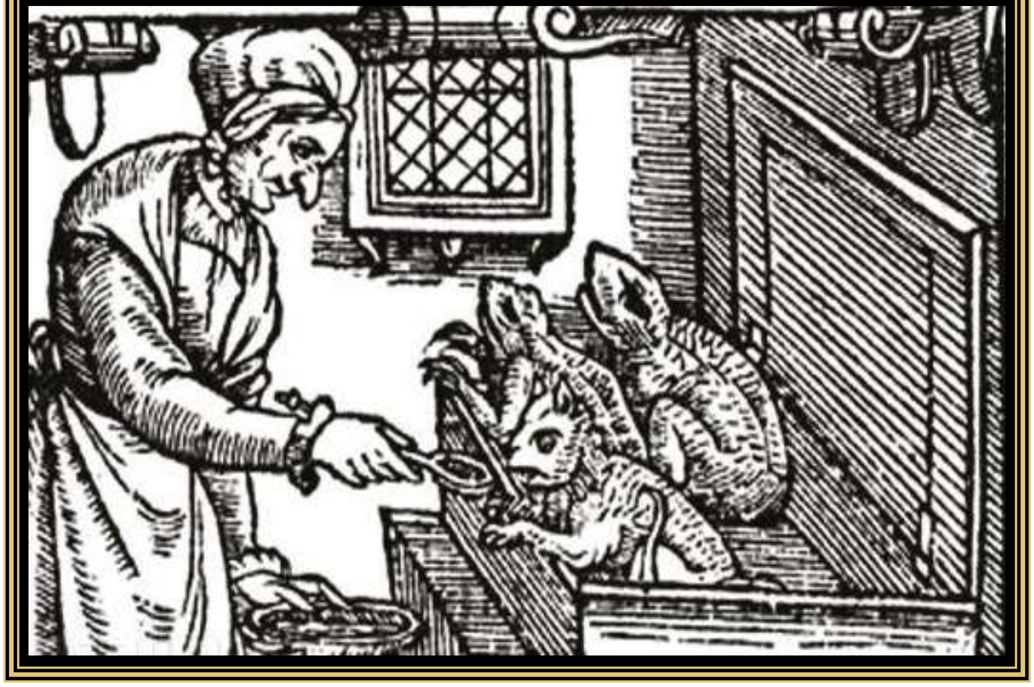
Love magic was also popular, with white witches consulted to help bring about a marriage or reinvigorate a relationship that had gone off the boil. Wise women were widely consulted on pregnancy and childbirth, attending deliveries and staying with mothers afterwards. White witches were also believed to be able to detect other witches whose intentions were harmful. Illness at the time could be seen as a sign of being bewitched and as well as asking for a cure, the client of the cunning folk might also want to discover who was doing them harm. The white witch rarely named a suspect. Instead, they would offer instructions on rituals which they said would draw the perpetrator to the victim's house, or they would tell them that the person they met at a particular time was

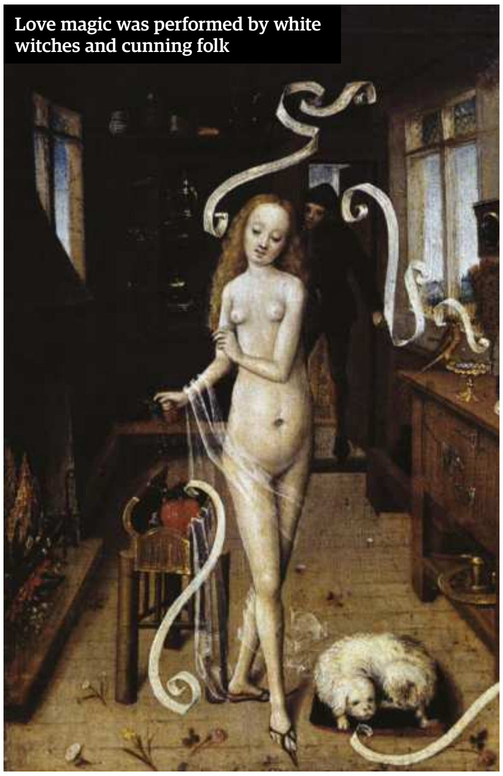
Why witches were usually women

Usually old, sometimes ugly, often female. The witch of children's fairytales still lingers as a stereotype today. Court records show that across Europe the majority of those tried as witches were women even though white witches and cunning folk were just as likely to be men. However, as the Church became more intent on stamping out all forms of heresy, women became the main focus of witch hunts.

From the 15th century onwards women were seen as increasingly vulnerable to the temptations of magic. They were viewed as sex mad and seriously stupid by many, and clerics writing on demonology described lust-filled women who were seduced into evil by the Devil and took part in unholy orgies.

Later reformers took an equally dim view. For Martin Luther, women were so weak that they were easily won over by the promises of magic. In the 16th and 17th centuries, witches were nearly always women and any men caught in the act were usually seen to have been tempted over to darkness by a wicked woman. But when the wave of persecutions ended and witchcraft was no longer pursued through the courts, the wise folk recorded in local communities once more featured men as well as women.





Love magic was performed by white witches and cunning folk

the guilty party. But in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, it was the white witch who was increasingly at risk of capture.

Attitudes to all forms of magic had been changing rapidly since the 1400s. The early Christian Church called both magic and witchcraft delusions. But during the Middle Ages, clerics turned their attention to witchcraft again. The German churchman, Heinrich Kramer, saw witches as a real threat to society and to the souls of his congregation. His *Malleus Maleficarum*, published in 1487, insisted that witchcraft was real and a heresy. It would influence attitudes for three hundred years. Kramer wanted witches hunted down, tortured if need be to extract confessions and put to death. Black witches, who used magic to harm others, were liable to arrest already. But now the idea began to take hold that all witches were wrong. Their powers came under suspicion and they were increasingly seen as agents of the Devil, in league with demons and taking part in dreadful rituals.

White witches or cunning folk were called many other names, including wizard, blessing witch, enchanter and charmer

Within decades, clerics in southern Germany had started often large-scale witch hunts which then spread to other countries. In Trier, a series of persecutions under Archbishop Johann VII von Schonenberg at the end of the century left two villages with just two residents - the rest had been executed as witches. In Lorraine, the judge Nicholas Remy claimed he had sentenced 900 witches to death in just ten years. Court records show that many of those accused were originally suspected because they carried out what had previously been thought of as everyday magic. Under duress or through fear, many confessed to darker forms of witchcraft. Sometimes, those who admitted to being a witch went on to point the finger at others. In 1582, Ursula Kemp was arrested in St Osyth in Essex and admitted using witchcraft to kill a child and her own sister in law. She then accused others of being witches - several went on to confess to gruesome crimes after their arrests.

Hysteria around witchcraft began to build across Europe. Jobs that had been the preserve of the respected wise woman, like midwifery, became a target for persecutions especially as beliefs grew that witches used fat from children to make flying ointments. In 1669, a 67-year-old lying-in maid called Anna Ebeler was hanged in Augsburg in Germany after being accused of killing a new mother with a bowl of soup. In England, witchfinders began to appear. These self-appointed justices would visit different towns and, for a set fee, root out supposed witches who were then handed over to the courts.

The witch hunts across Europe in the 16th and 17th century are believed to have led to at least 40,000 documented executions. Many more are thought to have died while in prison awaiting trial or to have taken their own lives through fear. By the 18th century, witchcraft began to fade from criminal records, but the Enlightenment also meant that many of the old practices that had got white witches into so much trouble had lost their sway with people. Old wives' tales and folklore still exist, but they are just echoes of a time when they gave real power to the ghoul next door.

Home of a cunning woman

The tools of the trade for a folk healer
England, 17th century

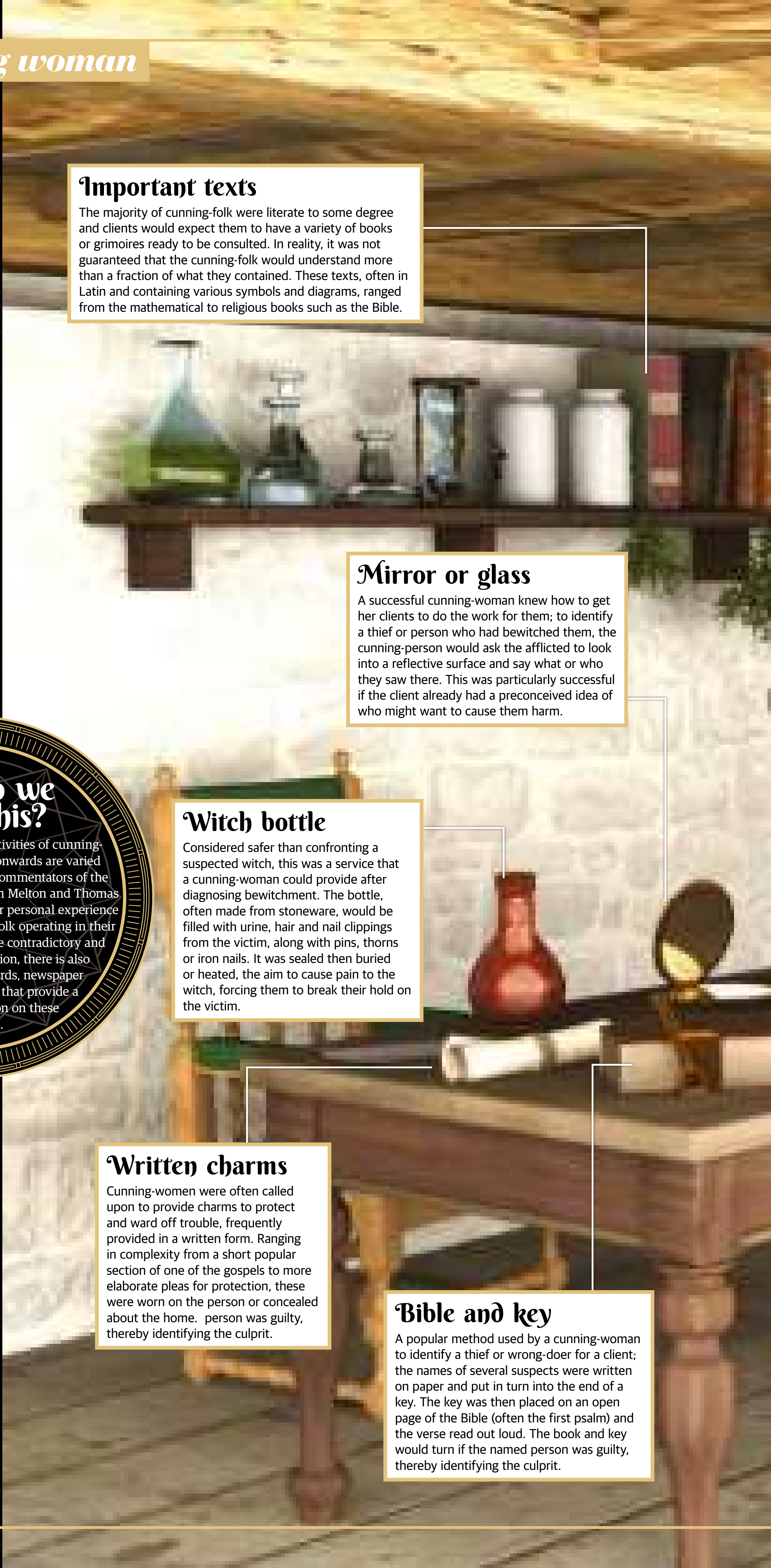
Cunning-folk were in existence from at least the 14th century, but by the 17th century they were a staple part of English life. Considered a blessing by those who used their services and a plague by social commentators of the day, it was estimated that one could not go more than 16 kilometres without coming across a practicing cunning-man or woman in some parts of England, meaning most would have met one at some point.

Well known for their healing skills, they were often called on during times of sickness. Love magic was also particularly popular, with curious young women wanting help conceiving or to know the identity of a future husband. Others came wanting help identifying a thief and recovering stolen property, and even, in some cases, locating hidden treasures. Although often lumped together with witches, cunning-folk were actually the anti-witch, and one of their most called upon skills was that of diagnosing bewitchment and un-witching the victims.

Unlike witches, cunning-folk were never pursued with any great enthusiasm by authorities, and although some of their practices, such as the location of treasure, were punishable under witchcraft legislation, they were never prosecuted in great numbers. The line between cunning-woman and witch was sometimes thin, however, and there was little help for those against who popular opinion turned.

How do we know this?

Sources for the work and activities of cunning-folk from the 16th century onwards are varied and sometimes conflicting. Commentators of the day such as Reginald Scot, John Melton and Thomas Cooper among others gave their personal experience and opinions on the cunning-folk operating in their areas, and while these can be contradictory and coloured by personal opinion, there is also evidence from court records, newspaper and pamphlet accounts that provide a wealth of information on these characters.



Important texts

The majority of cunning-folk were literate to some degree and clients would expect them to have a variety of books or grimoires ready to be consulted. In reality, it was not guaranteed that the cunning-folk would understand more than a fraction of what they contained. These texts, often in Latin and containing various symbols and diagrams, ranged from the mathematical to religious books such as the Bible.

Mirror or glass

A successful cunning-woman knew how to get her clients to do the work for them; to identify a thief or person who had bewitched them, the cunning-person would ask the afflicted to look into a reflective surface and say what or who they saw there. This was particularly successful if the client already had a preconceived idea of who might want to cause them harm.

Witch bottle

Considered safer than confronting a suspected witch, this was a service that a cunning-woman could provide after diagnosing bewitchment. The bottle, often made from stoneware, would be filled with urine, hair and nail clippings from the victim, along with pins, thorns or iron nails. It was sealed then buried or heated, the aim to cause pain to the witch, forcing them to break their hold on the victim.

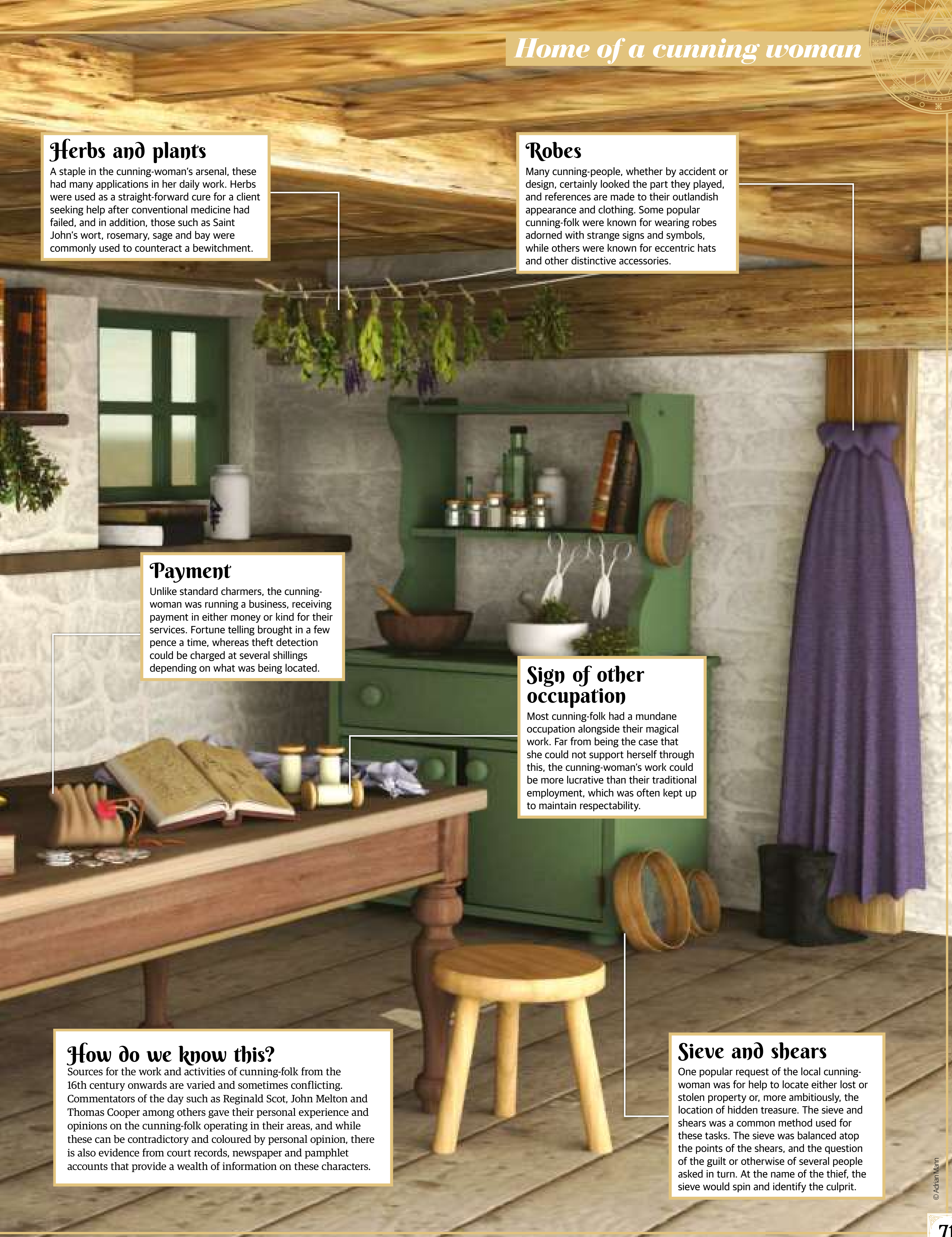
Written charms

Cunning-women were often called upon to provide charms to protect and ward off trouble, frequently provided in a written form. Ranging in complexity from a short popular section of one of the gospels to more elaborate pleas for protection, these were worn on the person or concealed about the home. person was guilty, thereby identifying the culprit.

Bible and key

A popular method used by a cunning-woman to identify a thief or wrong-doer for a client; the names of several suspects were written on paper and put in turn into the end of a key. The key was then placed on an open page of the Bible (often the first psalm) and the verse read out loud. The book and key would turn if the named person was guilty, thereby identifying the culprit.

Home of a cunning woman



Herbs and plants

A staple in the cunning-woman's arsenal, these had many applications in her daily work. Herbs were used as a straight-forward cure for a client seeking help after conventional medicine had failed, and in addition, those such as Saint John's wort, rosemary, sage and bay were commonly used to counteract a bewitchment.

Robes

Many cunning-people, whether by accident or design, certainly looked the part they played, and references are made to their outlandish appearance and clothing. Some popular cunning-folk were known for wearing robes adorned with strange signs and symbols, while others were known for eccentric hats and other distinctive accessories.

Payment

Unlike standard charmers, the cunning-woman was running a business, receiving payment in either money or kind for their services. Fortune telling brought in a few pence a time, whereas theft detection could be charged at several shillings depending on what was being located.

Sign of other occupation

Most cunning-folk had a mundane occupation alongside their magical work. Far from being the case that she could not support herself through this, the cunning-woman's work could be more lucrative than their traditional employment, which was often kept up to maintain respectability.

How do we know this?

Sources for the work and activities of cunning-folk from the 16th century onwards are varied and sometimes conflicting. Commentators of the day such as Reginald Scot, John Melton and Thomas Cooper among others gave their personal experience and opinions on the cunning-folk operating in their areas, and while these can be contradictory and coloured by personal opinion, there is also evidence from court records, newspaper and pamphlet accounts that provide a wealth of information on these characters.

Sieve and shears

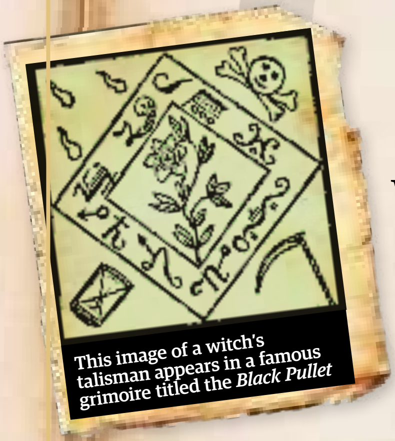
One popular request of the local cunning-woman was for help to locate either lost or stolen property or, more ambitiously, the location of hidden treasure. The sieve and shears was a common method used for these tasks. The sieve was balanced atop the points of the shears, and the question of the guilt or otherwise of several people asked in turn. At the name of the thief, the sieve would spin and identify the culprit.

© Adrian Mann

The Witch's spellbook

Witches have recorded their spells and incantations and referred to them throughout history as ancient texts survive to influence modern practices

Written by Mike Haskew


This image of a witch's talisman appears in a famous grimoire titled the *Black Pullet*

Since the concepts and practice of witchcraft date to classical antiquity, it follows reasonably that those who have concocted potions, chanted incantations, and cast spells throughout history should record their methods and makings for themselves and future generations.

While accused witches of the Middle Ages and early modern period were convenient scapegoats, targets for hunters who used them to explain the origins of famine, pestilence, disease, and other misfortune, they evidently were literate, capable of either reading and writing or availing themselves of scribes or associates who performed these services. It is estimated that roughly 80 percent of accused witches in 16th-18th century Europe were women, often old, poor and sometimes unattractive in appearance. Remarkably, so-called witches were also pioneers in medicine, chemistry, and other disciplines who managed to preserve their knowledge - their witchcraft - in writing.

Ancient Egyptians and Greeks laid down liturgy and literature on papyrus, referencing spells that required "an offering of frankincense" or the placing of an "uncorrupted and pure" child in a trance before a glowing fire. Dating to the 11th century, the *Picatrix* was originally written in Arabic, confirming the precept that witchcraft transcends cultural boundaries, and its more than 400 pages include some concoctions with disgusting ingredients along with spells, focusing on astrological energy in the pursuit of knowledge and power. Similarly, the *Galdrabók* originated in Iceland in the 16th century and contains contributions from numerous witches. Its 47 spells include runes purported to harbour supernatural attributes, and much of its content relates to physical healing for such conditions as fatigue, headaches, sleeplessness, as well as childbirth pain.

Although its exact date of origin is unknown, *The Sworn Book of Honorius* is verified to have existed during the 14th century. Its oldest preserved manuscript dates to 1347. The work opens with a stinging rebuke of the Roman Catholic church, and its text that supposedly assists in the practice of necromancy, or communication with the dead. Witchcraft lore explicitly specifies that only three copies of *The Sworn Book of Honorius* can be produced, that anyone who possesses one of these and is unable to find a suitable heir must take the text to their grave, and that those who ascribe to its teachings are required to refrain from keeping company with women.

Tangible evidence points to a substantial body of written witchcraft teachings that span the period from ancient times through the early modern period. Many of these have been exhaustively studied both for their genuine original purpose and their historical significance.

> "Witches were pioneers in medicine, chemistry, and other disciplines who managed to preserve their knowledge in writing"

Visions and mysterious volumes

Spellbooks come in all shapes and sizes, from leechbooks dealing with common maladies, to grimoires instructing how to summon demons

The body of written texts associated with witchcraft varies widely and includes books of magic spells called grimoires, medieval Anglo-Saxon medical tomes called leechbooks, and volumes of cryptic symbols known as sigils that have often been associated with sorcery or otherwise serve as the signature of - or way to invoke - a demon.

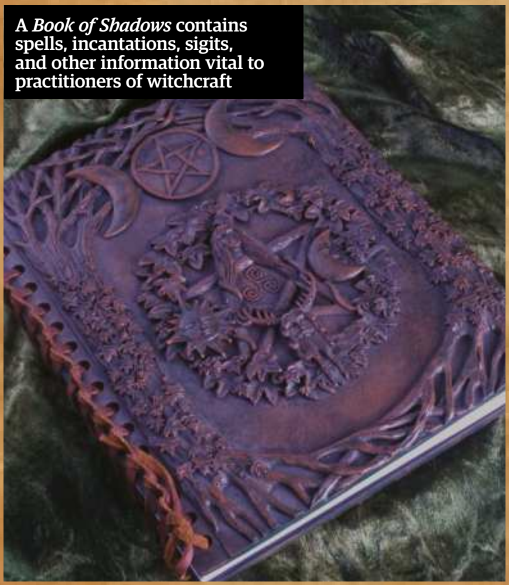
The grimoire is a general handbook for witches, and its origin is nearly as old as the practice itself. Grimoires include spells, incantations, instructions for making talismans and amulets, and procedures for summoning angels, demons, and other-worldly spirits. The earliest grimoires are believed to have been produced in ancient Mesopotamia and predate the 4th century BCE. An essential component of a witch's work, they have been produced across millennia, and the books themselves have at times been considered sources of supernatural power and strength.

> The word *grimoire* comes from a French figure of speech meaning 'hard to understand'

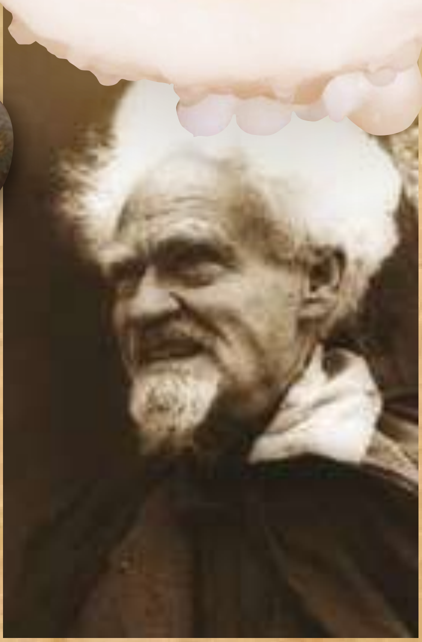
One of the most famous grimoires is the *Key of Solomon*, which some have claimed to be authored by King Solomon himself. However, the work more likely dates to 14th century Renaissance Italy. Divided into two books, it exists in numerous translations, some of which contain subtle differences. A work of conjurations and curses, purifications, and other exercises, its content reflects a multi-cultural Islamic, Jewish, and Late Antiquity Greco-Roman influence.

The best-known book of its type, *Bald's Leechbook*, dates to the 9th century, and a single manuscript, housed in the British Library in London, survives. Divided into two sections, the first dealing with external maladies and the second with internal conditions, the leechbook offers practical cures for headaches, shingles, and aching feet.

Medieval witches used sigils as representations of angels and demons that they might call upon, and the grimoire *The Lesser Key of Solomon* lists 72 demons representing the hierarchy of hell and their corresponding sigils. Presenting a demon's sigil was thought to provide the witch with some degree of control over it.


A *Book of Shadows* contains spells, incantations, sigits, and other information vital to practitioners of witchcraft

A witch consults a spell book while performing an incantation. Spell books are often personalised by their owners



A modern grimoire

Sometime during the late 1940s, Gerald Gardner, the acknowledged father of Wicca, wrote his *Book of Shadows*, subsequently introducing it to the members of his Bricket Wood coven. While *Book of Shadows* is a term generally used to describe a witch's personal volume containing their own incantations and rituals, Gardner contended that his book included information he had been given as a member of the New Forest coven decades earlier along with his own contributions.

Although he asserted that sections of the book had their origins in early witchcraft historiography, sections were actually attributable to other books as well, such as the *Key of Solomon*, a text probably from the Renaissance, the *Gospel of the Witches* written by Charles Godfrey Leland and purported to be the religious book of an Italian coven, and from the writings of poet Rudyard Kipling and occult practitioner and magician Aleister Crowley. Doreen Valiente, high priestess of the Bricket Wood coven, made significant alterations to Gardner's book after questioning its authorship.

Gardner stated that witches had been prohibited from putting their rituals and incantations in writing in earlier times due to fear of persecution, but they later began doing so. The publication of Gardner's *Book of Shadows* spurred greater interest in Wicca, and the notion of such books has become a staple of popular culture.

Practising the witch's art

The witch persona revolves around a relationship with the devil and the ability to cast spells, predict the future, heal the sick, and place curses. After their arrest, accused witches were subjected to harsh interrogation and torture. Confessions were extracted under duress, and they were often based strongly on suggestion, ranging from flying on brooms, poles or animals to meetings with the devil involving seduction, debauched ritual sex, and selling of souls in exchange for dark powers. Accused witches were stripped and searched for marks on their bodies, signs the individual was the devil's own.

Witches would cast spells for many purposes, from finding love to improving financial or social position, punishing enemies, and removing warts. Those willing to pay might purchase a spell for a good harvest. Conversely, witches were also accused of murders, including the deaths of children. During the Middle Ages, a significant climatic cooling period occurred – witches were blamed for crop failures, pandemic disease, and any increases in criminal activity that followed. After the Black Death swept through Europe in the 14th century and decimated villages, the attitude toward witches shifted from curiosity and tolerance to fear and persecution.

> Witches were blamed for anything from crop failures to the sudden death of children

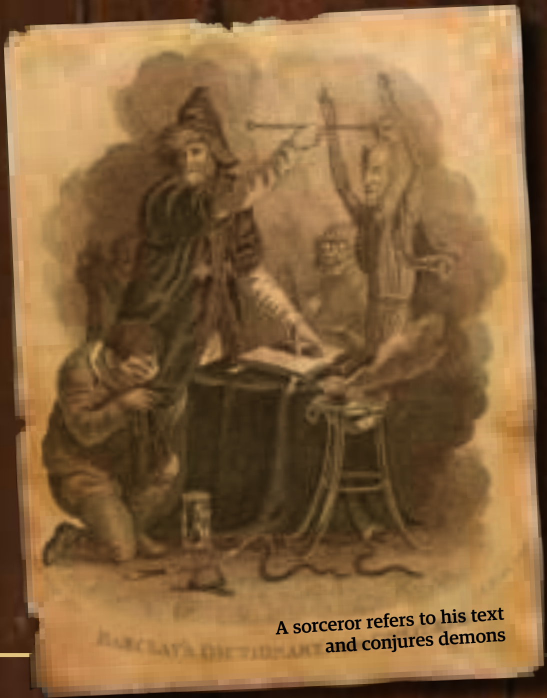
Curing any ailments from cancer to halitosis and poison ivy were other common practices undertaken by witches. Simmering the fresh root of a dogtooth violet or the tongue of an adder in milk and then drinking the concoction supposedly cured stomach ulcers, while an ounce of trailing arbutus leaves in boiling water, taken several times a day, cured kidney stones.

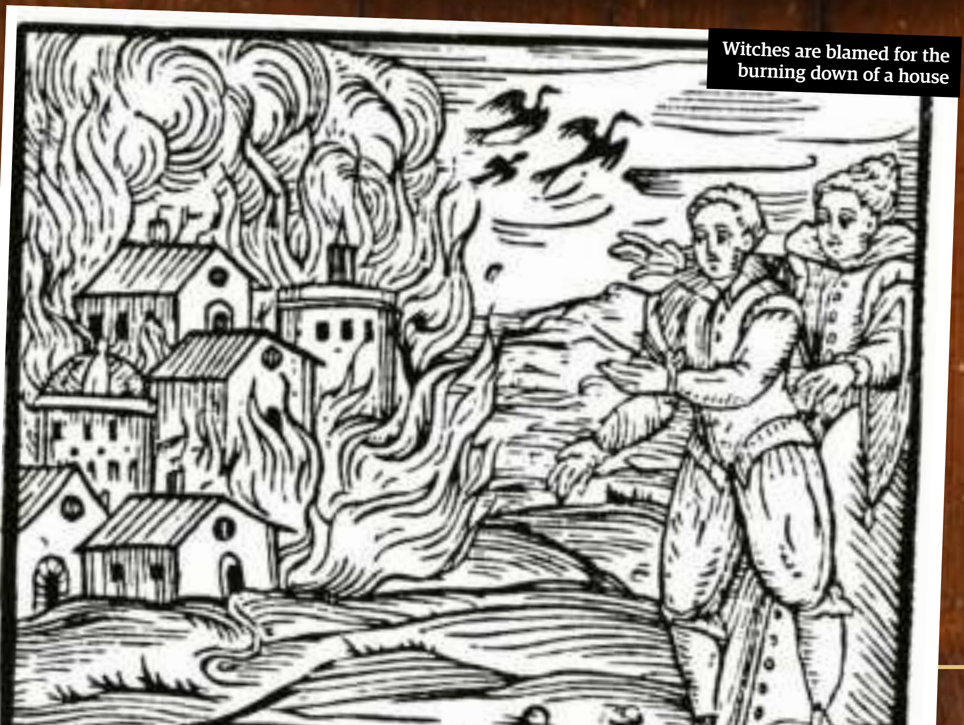
Perhaps the most infamous of England's witch trails was that of the Pendle Witches in Lancashire in the summer of 1612. Nine women and two men were hanged, and the entire affair began with a curse. A young woman either begged or asked to purchase pins from a local peddler. After she was refused, the peddler suffered a stroke. The woman confessed that she had sold her soul to Satan and asked the Devil to cripple the peddler. Curses ranged from simple to complex, involving just a spit of saliva, a written note later burned, clay figures or dolls, or a lengthy ritual spanning several days.

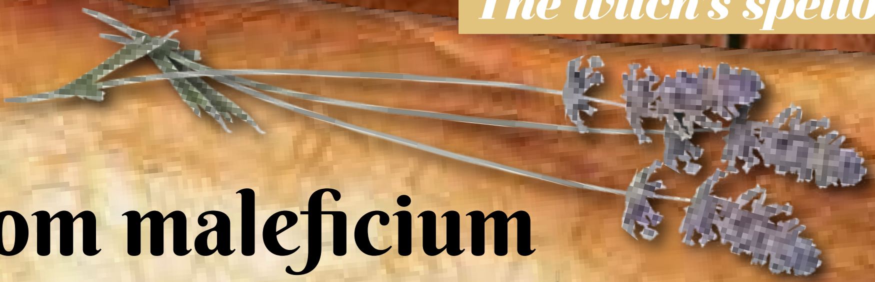
Despite this, witches were consulted for their clairvoyance or precognition. One English witch, Mother Shipton of Knaresborough, Yorkshire, is believed to have predicted the invention of trains, planes, automobiles, and the telegraph centuries before they appeared. Amulets and charms were also believed to be effective protection. Carried or hung in windows, these consisted of bags of herbs, sigits, or miniature everyday items such as nails or horseshoes.

Spells in a witch's arsenal

- Afflicted neighbour's children with strange symptoms and behaviour
- Conjured the spirit of a dead man
- Manipulated the weather to produce rain or snow
- Caused an individual to suffer nightmares
- Cast a love spell to win the heart of a man
- Cursed enemies with continuing bad luck
- Provided protection from diseases
- Rid neighbour of an unwanted husband
- Recovered a lost object
- Silenced a gossiper


A sorceror refers to his text and conjures demons


Witches are blamed for the burning down of a house



Protection from maleficium

Dead Cat

In Europe the custom of placing a dead cat within the walls of a house persists to this day. While serving as a good luck charm, the cat's remains are also believed by some to repel or lure a witch away from the premises. Although some have asserted that cats were once walled in alive, forensic evidence of dried carcasses suggest that the placement occurred after the animal had died. Dead rodents or birds have been discovered along with the cats as well.

Elf Arrow

The ancient elf arrow, actually an arrowhead made by Neolithic peoples, was believed to have been used by elves to hunt cattle and inflict pains, called elfshot, on humans. However, when recovered they could be used as charms or amulets, often worn around the neck and adorned with silver, to ward of witches. Elf arrows were never to be sought, but were found in unusual places. They were to be protected from sunlight to prevent their falling into the hands of witches and used for evil purposes.

Witch Bottle

The witch bottle dates to the 16th century and provided a means of removing a spell cast by an adversarial witch. Sometimes prepared by another witch or folk healer, the witch bottle contained the victim's hair, nail clippings, and urine, and possibly rosemary, bent needles and pins, and red wine. Buried at the farthest corner of the victim's property, beneath the hearth, or in some other nondescript location, the witch bottle supposedly irritated the offending witch to the point that they would remove the spell.

Witch's Seat

Also known as a witch's stone, these were stones that protruded from the chimneys of homes. Their original purpose was probably to prevent water from running into the house between the thatched roof and stone chimney; however, through the years the stones became associated with witches flying about during their returns from meetings with the Devil. They supposedly rested on the seats. In the absence of the stones, the witches might descend the chimney and cause turmoil in the home.

Witch Ball

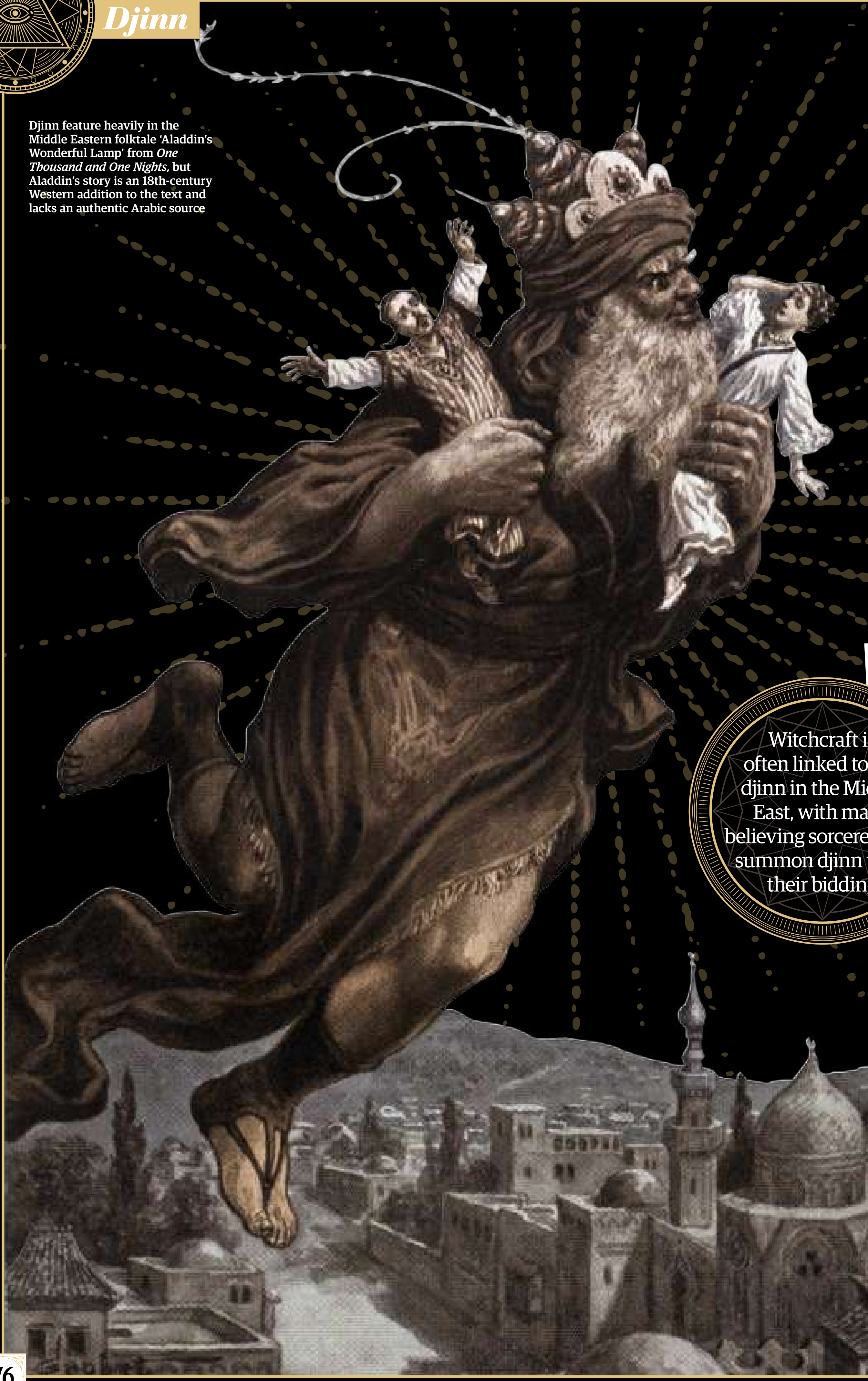
Typically made of brightly coloured glass, these spherical objects were popularised during the Middle Ages. Early examples were crudely made, but by the 19th century their production was improved with higher-quality glass. Sometimes hung in an eastern window or suspended by a thread, they warded off witches or trapped them inside the orbs. Folk tales suggest that witch balls also protected the dwelling from the curse of the evil eye. The balls were sometimes filled with holy water or salt to increase effectiveness.

Rowan

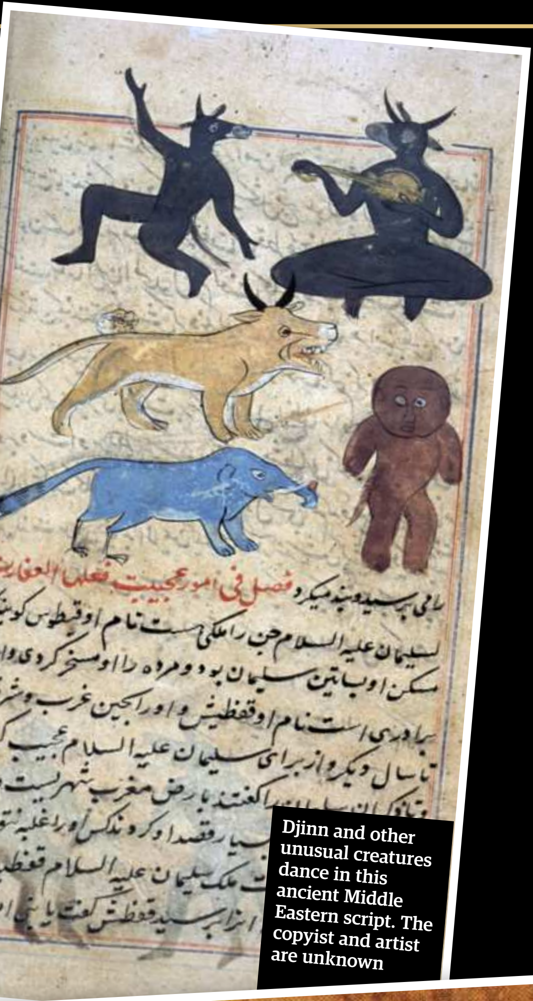
In Britain the rowan tree was said to be the tree from which the Devil hanged his mother. Planted near the front door of a home or elsewhere on the property, it was considered a powerful deterrent against witches. The physical appearance of the rowan, a five-pointed star or pentagram on each berry and a vivid red colour, was believed the source of its strength. Crosses were sometimes made of rowan wood and worn for personal protection. Pieces of rowan were also attached to cattle.

© Gettyimages, Alamy, Thinkstock

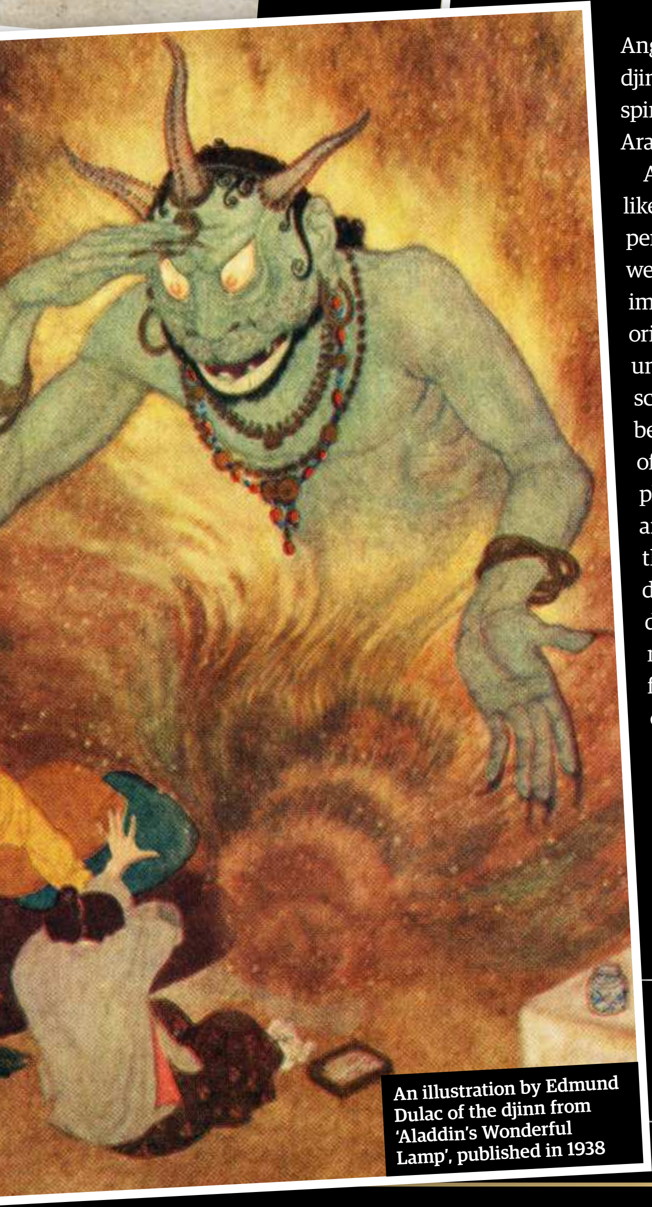
Djinn feature heavily in the Middle Eastern folktale 'Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp' from *One Thousand and One Nights*, but Aladdin's story is an 18th-century Western addition to the text and lacks an authentic Arabic source



Witchcraft is often linked to the djinn in the Middle East, with many believing sorcerers can summon djinn to do their bidding



Djinn and other unusual creatures dance in this ancient Middle Eastern script. The copyist and artist are unknown



An illustration by Edmund Dulac of the djinn from 'Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp', published in 1938

Djinn

Djinn are so much more than wish-granting, lamp-inhabiting genies, especially as far as Arabian and Islamic mythology is concerned

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

When translated into English, djinn means 'hidden from sight' or 'the hidden ones', so naturally there's still a lot of mystery surrounding them. Anglicised as 'genies' and Romanised as 'djinn', djinn are supernatural creatures (categorised as spirits and demons) that played a large part in Arabian and later Islamic mythology.

A lot of Arabian people worshipped djinn like gods during the Pre-Islamic period, but unlike gods djinn were not regarded as being immortal. Though the exact origin of djinn remains unclear, a number of scholars believe that they began as malevolent spirits of deserts and unclean places who could take animal form. Others think they were originally pagan deities that fell from grace as other deities became more important. Djinn may have been worshipped but they were also feared and thought to be the cause of a variety of diseases and mental illnesses, with the mentally ill being described as 'majnun', Arabic for 'djinn-possessed'.

As far as Islamic theology is concerned, djinn has two definitions, the first being an object that human sensory organs cannot detect, including angels, demons and the interior of human beings, and the second being an invisible entity created from smokeless fire by God, who roamed the earth before Adam.

It is believed by Muslims that Muhammad was sent as a prophet to both human and djinn communities. Likewise, ancient Israeli king Solomon was gifted by God to be able to talk to djinn and animals. The story goes that the djinn were originally sent to live in harmony with humans, but a certain amount of injustice and corruption led to God sending angels to battle the djinn. With the revelation of Islam they were given another chance at salvation.

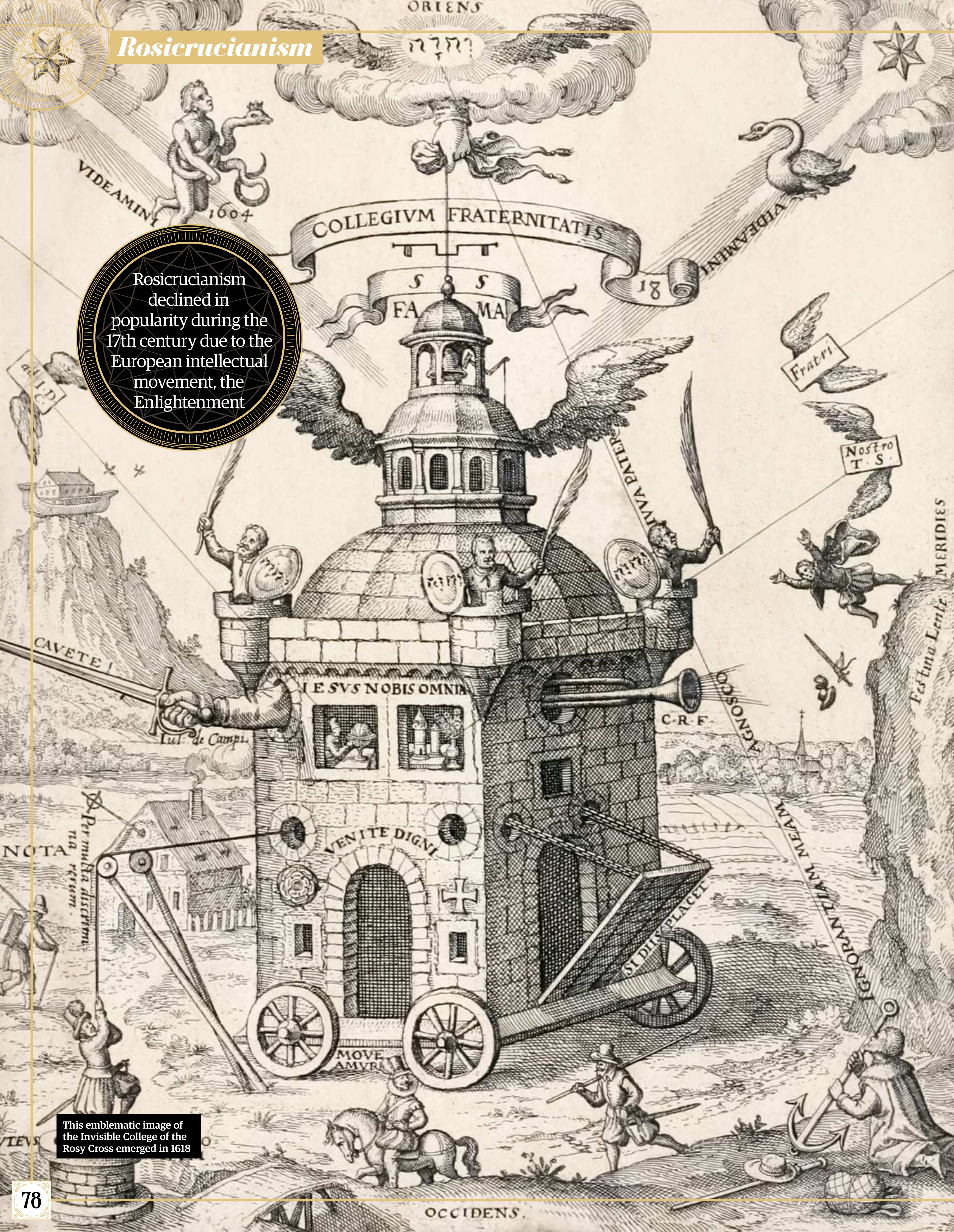
As the Islamic religion developed, the djinn were downgraded from deities to regular spirits. They were placed on the same level as humans and were subject to God's judgement, and able to attain futures in Paradise or Hell. When Islam began to spread outside of Arabia into Africa, Turkey, Iran and India, beliefs about the djinn also began to develop as they reached different communities. Persians likened djinn to the Daeva from Zoroastrian lore and believed they could possess humans. Moroccans believed this too and devised rituals to exorcise them. But all depictions of djinn shared certain similarities: they lived in human-like societies, where they ate and drank, practiced religion, had families and experienced emotions.

Even in modern times, many Egyptians believe sleep paralysis is caused by djinn attacks

"Djinn may have been worshipped, but they were also feared"

© Getty Images

> Rosicrucianism declined in popularity during the 17th century due to the European intellectual movement, the Enlightenment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AGNOSCO
IGNORANTIAM MEAM
VENITE DIGNI
SI DIIS PLACET
MOVE AMVR
NOTA
Per multa discrimina rerum
OCCIDENS

This emblematic image of the Invisible College of the Rosy Cross emerged in 1618

Rosicrucianism

When ancient manifestos telling of a secret brotherhood emerged after being 'hidden' for decades, a new spiritual movement began

Written by David Crookes

Europe in the early 17th century was not a happy place. It was a continent marked by religious divisions and political strife which would escalate into the bloody Thirty Years' War that led to eight million lives being lost.

At the same time, it was a period of great change. During the century, modern philosophy and science emerged thanks to impressive thinkers such as Newton and Descartes. But were these men also members of the spiritual movement Rosicrucianism? Some have said so but, alas, we may never know.

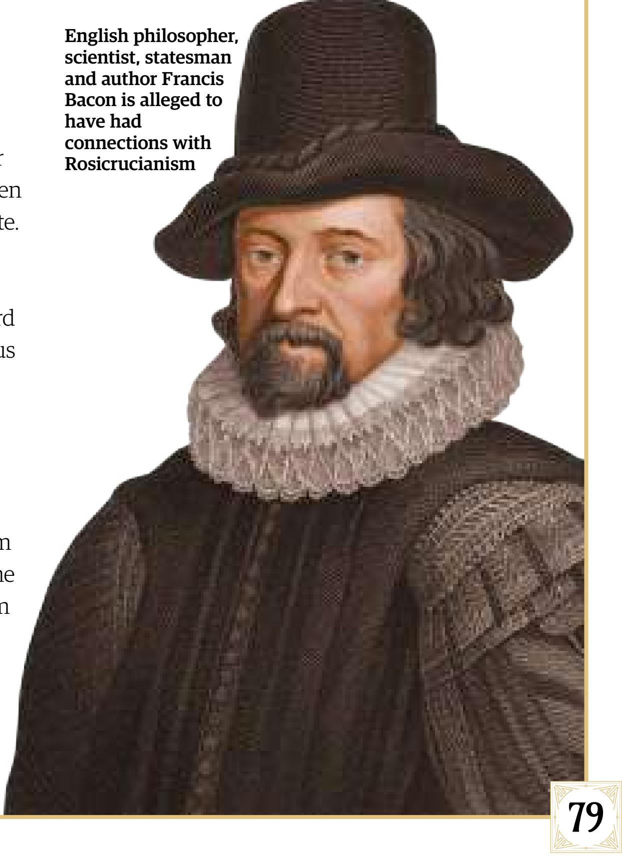
There are a great many stories and myths about Rosicrucianism, not least those which surround its origins. What we know to be true, however, is that in 1614 in the Holy Roman Empire state of Hesse-Kassel, located in present-day Germany, the first of two anonymously published manifestos was published that would cause a huge stir - not least because they apparently shed light on a supposed secret brotherhood that no-one had heard of before.

From that point on, you can take much of the origin story with a pinch of salt. For while the first of these manifestos, the *Fama Fraternitatis of the Meritorious Order of the Rosy Cross*, was a revelation to all who read or learned about it, it was heralded as a hoax, a joke or mere allegory, depending on the interpretation, almost from the start. But that's not to say it didn't have many followers or believers or that it wasn't even legitimate. Quite the opposite. It was viewed as another path to enlightenment and many saw it as a way forward for intellectual, social, religious and political reform.

The *Fama Fraternitatis* told of a poor German doctor and mystic philosopher called Christian Rosenkreuz who, it was claimed, had travelled across Damascus, Egypt and Morocco towards Jerusalem at the turn of the 15th century in a bid to learn the occult secrets of the universe, obtain true wisdom and discover the elixir of life.

Over the course of his journey, Rosenkreuz (or Father Brother C.R.C as he was referred to in the text), was said to have studied under secret Arabian masters of the occult arts, and he is understood to have built up an enviable knowledge of physics, mathematics, magic and Kabbalah.

> Key to Rosicrucianism is the belief that followers are party to life-changing secrets that originated in ancient times



English philosopher, scientist, statesman and author Francis Bacon is alleged to have had connections with Rosicrucianism

The tree of knowledge of good and evil, taken from *Figure segrete dei Rosacroce* (Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians), 1785

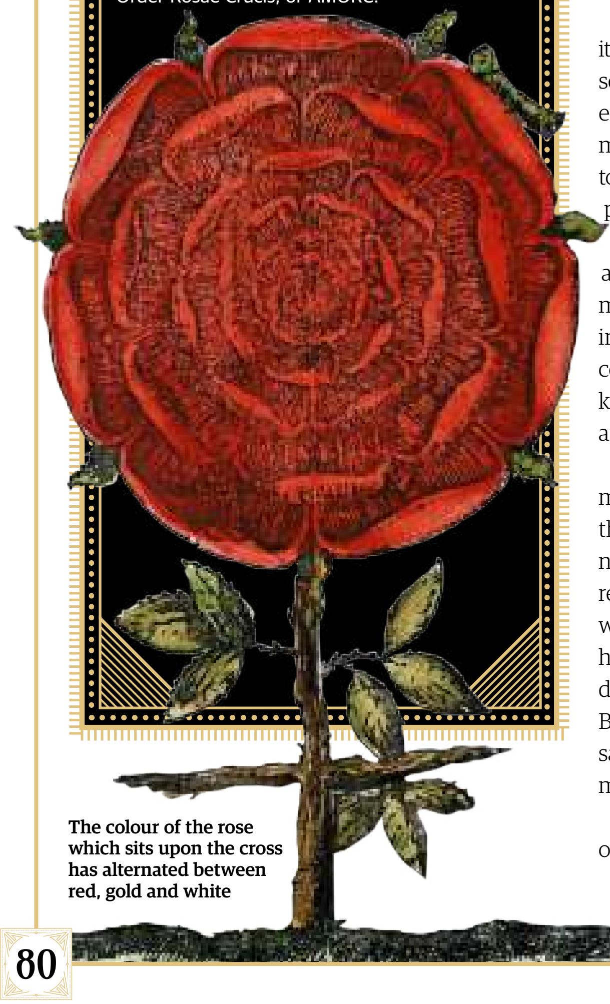
The symbol of the Rose Cross

The Rose Cross, otherwise known as the Rosy Cross, was said to have been created by Christian Rosenkreuz, the founder of Rosicrucianism. But since we know Rosenkreuz to be fictional, we can suppose it was actually the work of whoever produced the manifestos that underpinned the movement.

It takes the Christian symbol of the cross and embeds it with a rose at its centre, and it clearly marries well with Christian Rosenkreuz's name. What it actually symbolises is open to debate, although some posit that the cross represents the human body and the rose the unfolding consciousness of individuals.

The Rose Cross has also come to represent silence and salvation for some, while others see it as symbol of human reproduction being elevated to the spiritual, with the rose being female and the cross male.

Such is its power and attractiveness, it came to be used by more modern groups such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an organisation which was devoted to the study and practice of the occult from 1887 to 1903. It still forms part of the emblems of the Rosicrucian Fellowship and the Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, or AMORC.



The colour of the rose which sits upon the cross has alternated between red, gold and white

When he returned to Germany in 1407, he felt able and compelled to impart what he had learned, but he was claimed to have been ridiculed by the literati. Instead, he founded the Rosicrucian Order, or Order of the Rose Cross, and initially shared his knowledge with three receptive doctors. Two years later, Rosenkreuz went on to build a sanctuary called the House of the Holy Spirit where the followers – who by now numbered eight – would meet every year on the same day.

Each of those men were understood to be good doctors, determined to heal the sick for free. They agreed to wear only the dress of the country they were in, to continue the order by finding someone worthy to succeed themselves after death and, to ensure that the Fraternity would remain secret for 100 years.

But while it was suggested that Rosenkreuz himself had scribed the words, squirrelling the resulting manuscript away only for it be discovered later, only fundamentalists really took it literally or believed the man actually existed. The rest saw *Fama Fraternitatis* as an allegorical manuscript, although some have also come to believe that the Order of the Rose Cross may have been a disguise for another secret movement.

In any case, the point of Rosicrucianism was that it shed light on an ancient world order, blending science, alchemy, arts and mysticism with an emphasis on acquired knowledge as a way for mankind to move forward. Like Kabbalah it pointed to one truth, told via the use of various symbols, parables and metaphors.

Fama Fraternitatis explored philosophy, religion and ethics and this was furthered in the second manifesto, *Confessio Fraternitatis* (*The Confessio*) in 1615 which not only explicitly stated it was communicating "by parables" but said Rosenkreuz's knowledge had been imparted on him by angels and spirits.

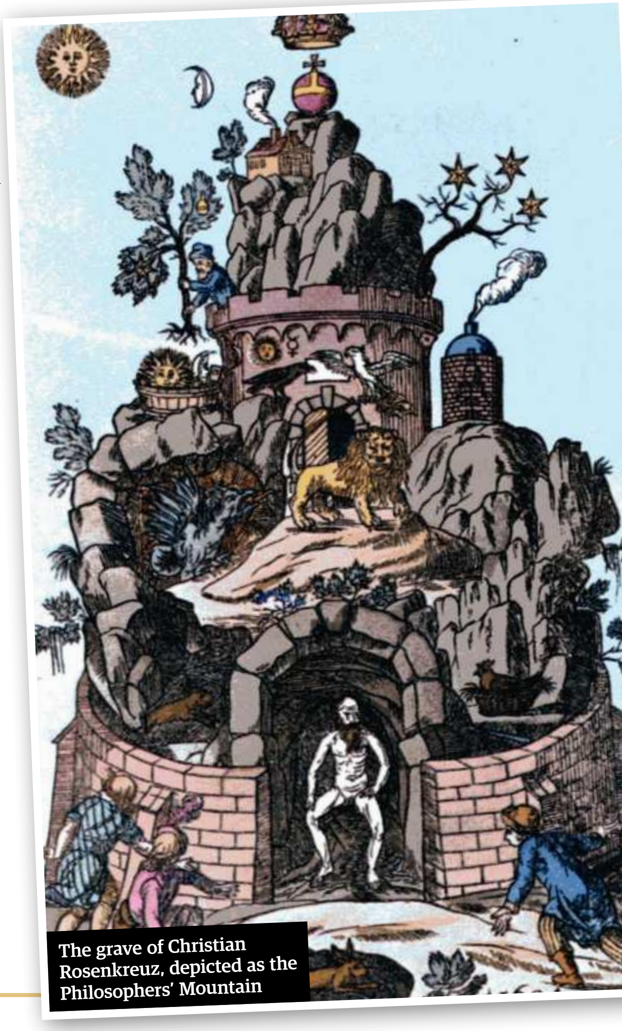
It cemented the esoteric order in the minds of many, and the fact that they were "concealed from the average man" and able to "provide insight into nature, the physical universe and the spiritual realm" helped to make them feel attractive. There was comfort in the belief that the movement heavily pre-dated contemporary times, even if it did not. Adding to the mystery was the claim that Brother Rosenkreuz was laid to rest in his own sanctuary in 1484 aged 106 – a vault said to contain many treasures and be lit by an inner sun.

The claim that this was found in a perfect state of preservation 120 years later in 1604 was merely a signal for general reformation, according to Dame Frances Yates, author of *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*. She says the opening of the vault symbolised the opening of a door in Europe and it was to lead to a new age of understanding. This displayed parallels with Christianity. Indeed, the Lutheran theologian Johann Valentin Andreae is said to have written the manifestos himself, although that is disputed and will perhaps never be resolved.

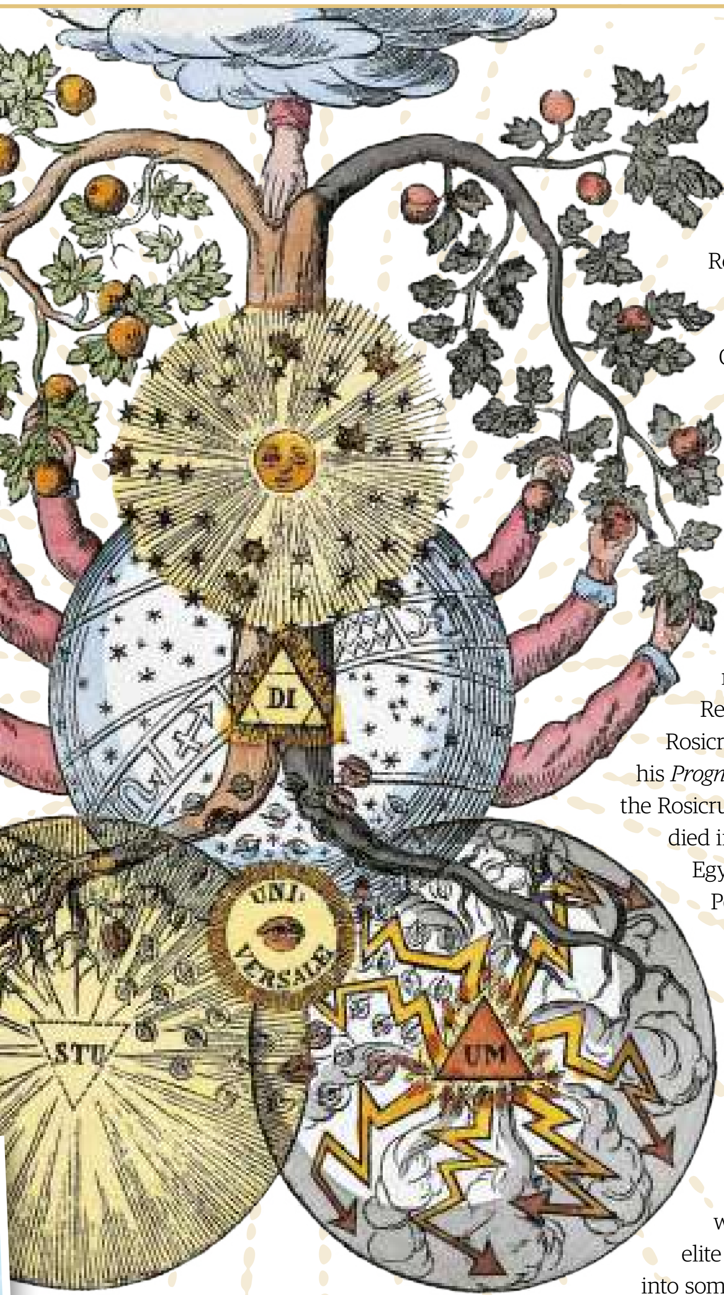
Johann Valentin Andreae, who wrote *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz*, said Rosicrucianism was an object of fun

Andreae did write an odd alchemical romance called the *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz* in 1616, however, and it too proved very influential.

Again, there were references of sorts to Christianity, not least in the division of the story into Seven Days, much like Genesis. There is also a nod to the Father of Lights – a phrase that appears in the book of James in the King James Bible along with nine Lords – and it is no coincidence there are nine books in the New Testament. So while Andreae said his work was



The grave of Christian Rosenkreuz, depicted as the Philosophers' Mountain



"ludibrium" (an object of fun), however, the parts that contained origins of Rosicrucianism were clear.

Reuben Clymer, a former Supreme Grand Master of the Fraternitas Rosae Crucis and author of *The Rosy Cross: Its Teachings* published in 1965, said the *Fama Fraternitatis* also combined many concepts and esoteric ideas, drawing upon symbolism and Paracelsian principles. Paracelsus pioneered aspects of the medical revolution of the Renaissance and Rosicrucians would study his *Prognostications*. Meanwhile, the Rosicrucian Michael Maier, who died in 1622, said: "Our origins are Egyptian and Samothrace, the Magi of Persia, the Pythagoreans and the Arabs."

Such deep inspiration and a revelatory world view won the movement many followers, and they numbered some high-profile thinkers such as the English philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon (who some argue may also have been behind the manifestos of 1614 and 1615). Anyone who took the teachings on board would feel special and part of a select elite by the fact that they were hooking into something deemed revelatory. There is an attraction in believing the Rosicrucians are operating invisibly and have the secret and power to put things right.

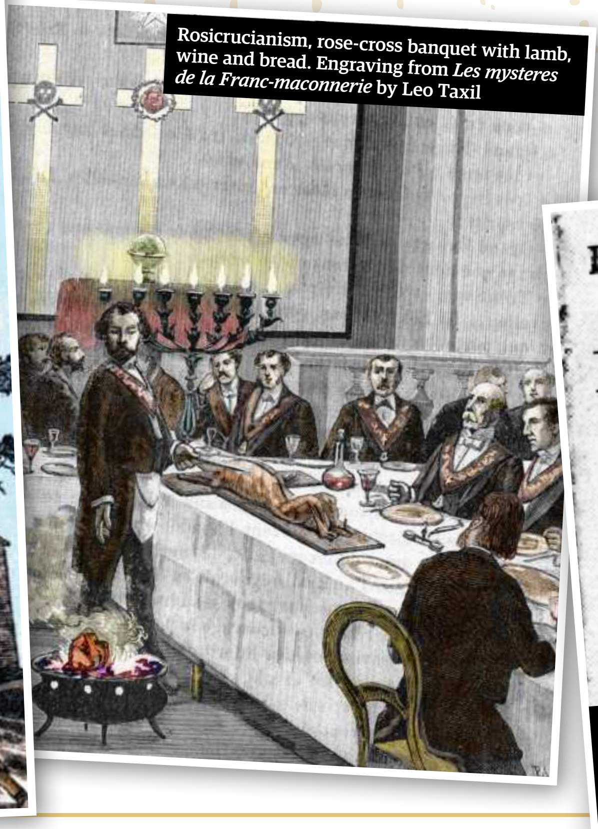
This concept is what is said to have led to the formation of the Invisible College which became a precursor group to the Royal Society of London. Rosicrucian principles steered people towards a utopian world populated by enlightened people spreading good and sharing knowledge of the arts and natural science. The Invisible College followed the teaching that knowledge can be disseminated among learned men gathering in groups.

Freemasonry was said to be an outgrowth of Rosicrucianism. Indeed, the English essayist Thomas De Quincey believed the movement influenced Freemasonry when it arrived in England, Prominent Rosicrucian Elias Ashmole joined the Freemasonry on 16 October 1646 and, in 1750, there was a reference to English Freemasons having copied some Rosicrucian ceremonies.

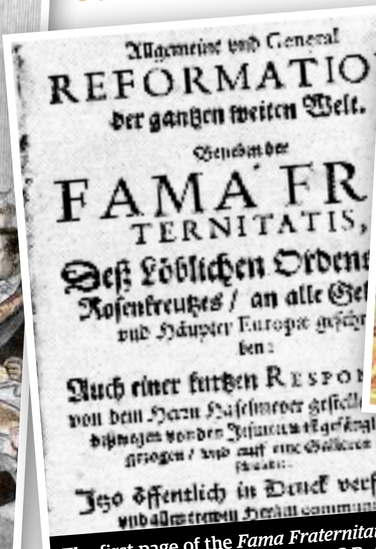
What this points to, however, is Rosicrucianism leading to secret societies rather than starting out as one. For while the story of Rosenkreuz makes claims of a brotherhood that met behind closed doors and remained hidden from society, it is more likely that Rosicrucianism formed in the early 17th century and that it did so very much out in the open, given that published work of that nature was difficult to keep under wraps.

Maier's *Silentium Post Clamores* claimed Rosicrucianism to be drawn from an eternal philosophy underlying all religions

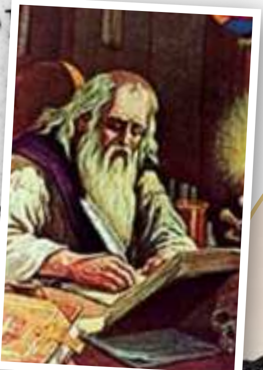
"Rosicrucianism shed light on an ancient world order, blending science, arts and mysticism"



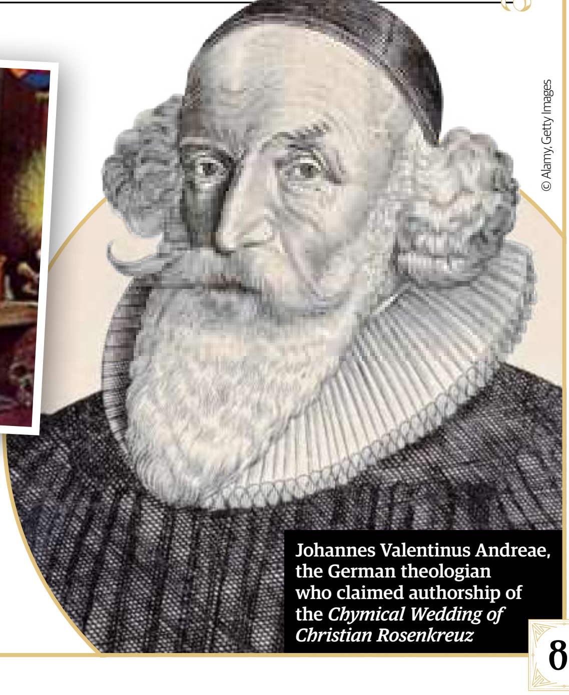
Rosicrucianism, rose-cross banquet with lamb, wine and bread. Engraving from *Les mysteres de la Franc-maconnerie* by Leo Taxil



Allgemeine und General
REFORMATIO
der gantzen weiten Welt.
Beneben der
FAMA FR
TERNITATIS,
Deß Löblichen Orden
Roſenkreutzes / an alle Ge
und Häupter Europæ geſch
ben:
Auch einer kurtzen RESPO



The first page of the *Fama Fraternitatis Rosae Crucis* which first told of Father C.R. (aka Christian Rosenkreuz)
Right: A symbolic representation of Christian Rosenkreuz, who most agree was fictional



Johannes Valentinus Andreae, the German theologian who claimed authorship of the *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz*

© Alamy, Getty Images

Mesmerism

18th-century physician Franz Mesmer believed aches and pains, both psychological and physical, could be fixed with the power of animal magnetism

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

People can't get enough of hypnosis, with great modern mind manipulators pulling in audiences and ticket sales, even though we all know it's just behavioural science played out as a spectacle. Hypnosis has been practiced for thousands of years. However, modern hypnosis was born at the end of the 18th century, when it was made popular by German physician Franz Mesmer, who developed it into a new practice he called mesmerism, or 'animal magnetism'. The concept of mesmerism is based around the idea that there is an invisible natural force possessed by all living and inanimate beings, including not just humans and animals but vegetables too. Mesmer believed that the force had physical effects, and could even be harnessed to promote healing.

As much as he tried, Mesmer never managed to achieve scientific recognition of his ideas. In 1784, a French Royal Commission was appointed by Louis XVI to study Mesmer's magnetic fluid theory in an attempt to help it gain some scientific validity. In the end, the commission agreed that Mesmer's cures were indeed cures, but there was no evidence to prove the existence of the magnetic fluid. In 1826, another commission was formed at the Royal Academy of Medicine in Paris purely to study the effects of mesmerism, without trying to prove the existence of magnetic fluid.

Even though Mesmer's ideas were pretty dubious to many, he still ended up attracting a number of followers in Europe and the United

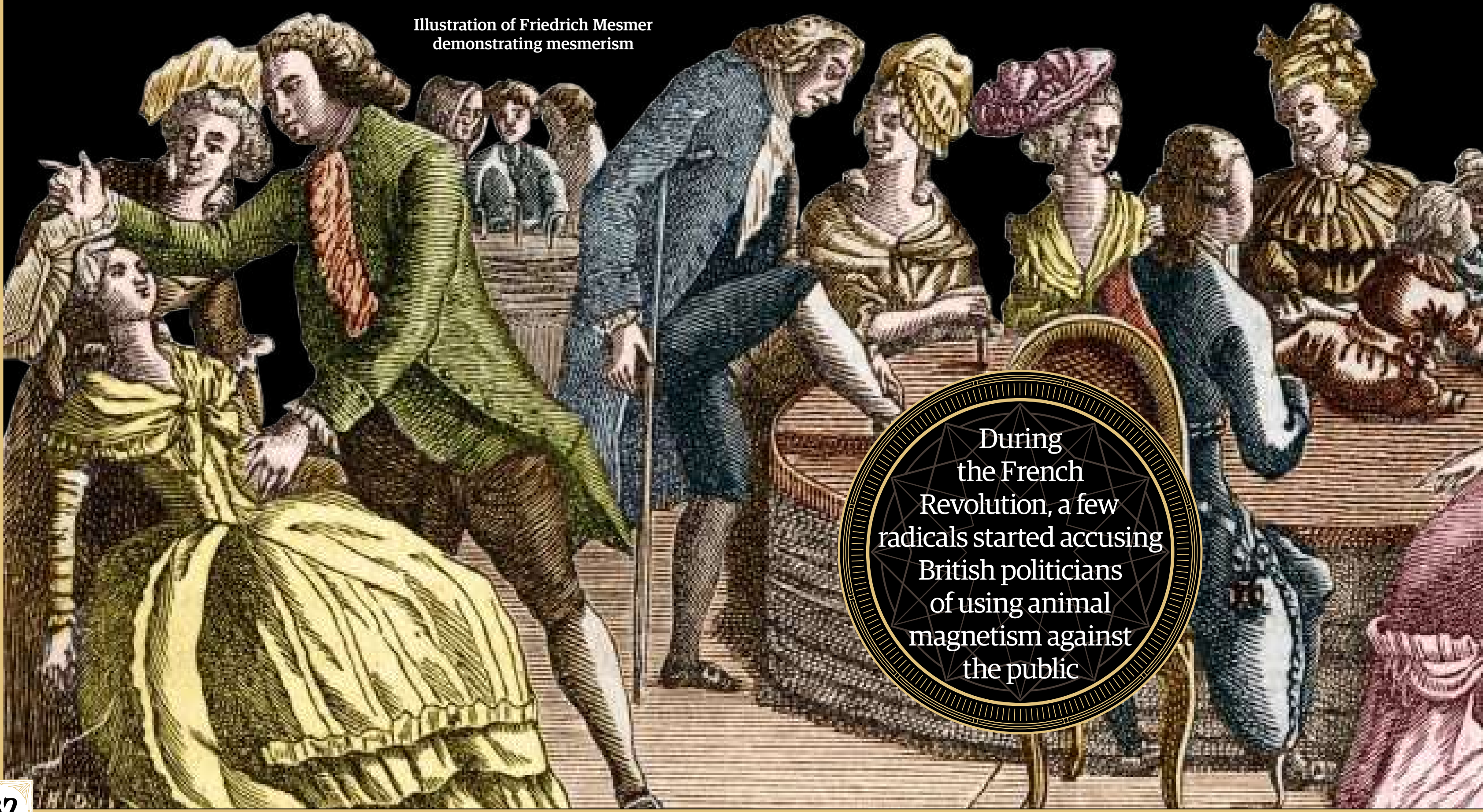


Illustration of Friedrich Mesmer demonstrating mesmerism

During the French Revolution, a few radicals started accusing British politicians of using animal magnetism against the public

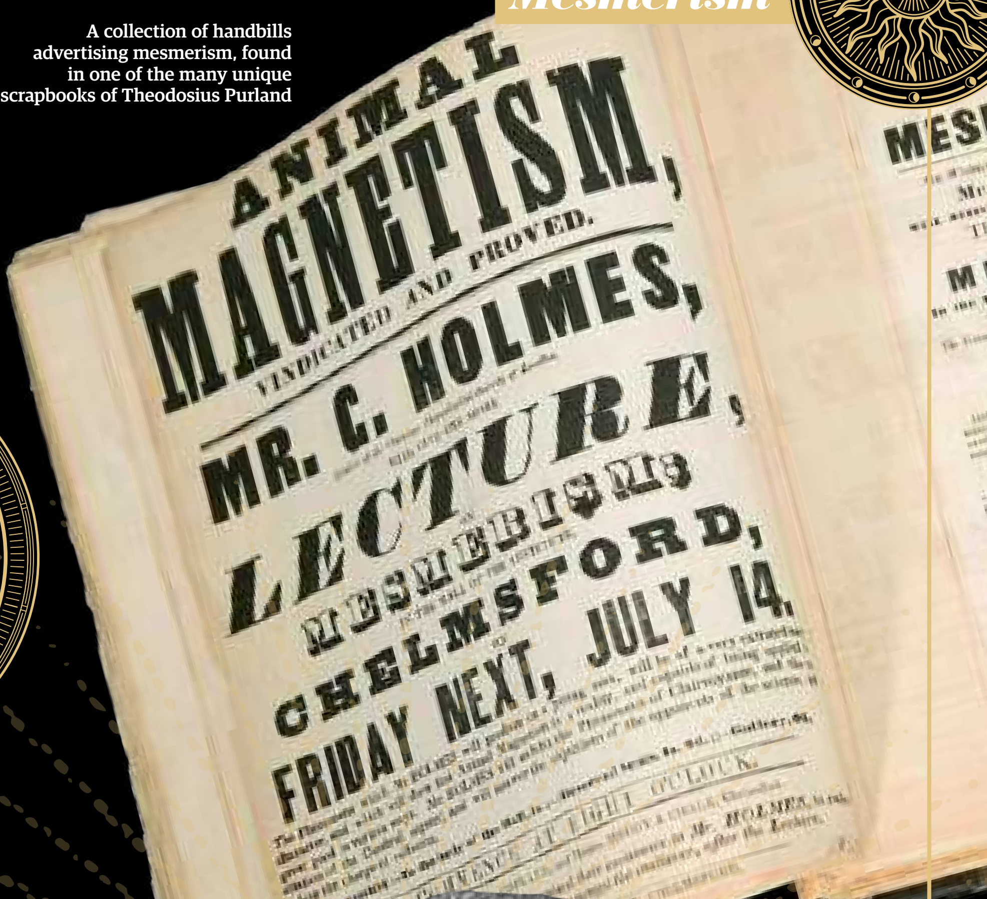
States. By the 19th century, mesmerism found its way into some parts of the world of medicine, with practitioners being known as magnetisers, rather than mesmerists.

During the Romantic Era, however, a degree of social scepticism emerged. The Societies of Harmony was created in France, and people started to pay to become members and study animal magnetism. It became a secretive art, and its practitioners refused to reveal their techniques, causing members to despair that they were paying for nothing. Mesmerism was quickly denounced and mocked by newspaper journalists and theatre, with the media claiming it to be nothing more than quackery.

Mesmerism is still to this day widely practiced as a form of alternative medicine. However, most physicians continue to debunk the theory, claiming that it's all down to self-suggestion through response expectancy, the idea that people are sometimes prone to experience things based on what they expect to experience.

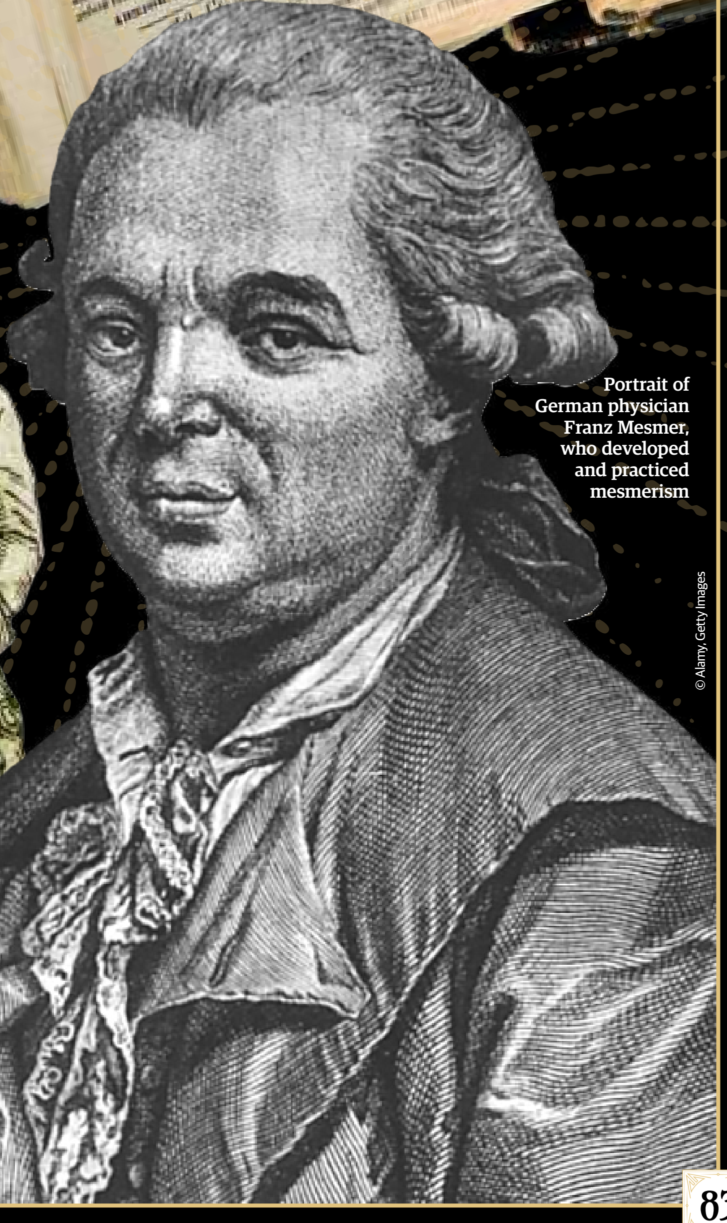
There are certain similarities between mesmerism and life force-oriented Asian practices like reiki and qigong

"There is an invisible natural force possessed by all beings"

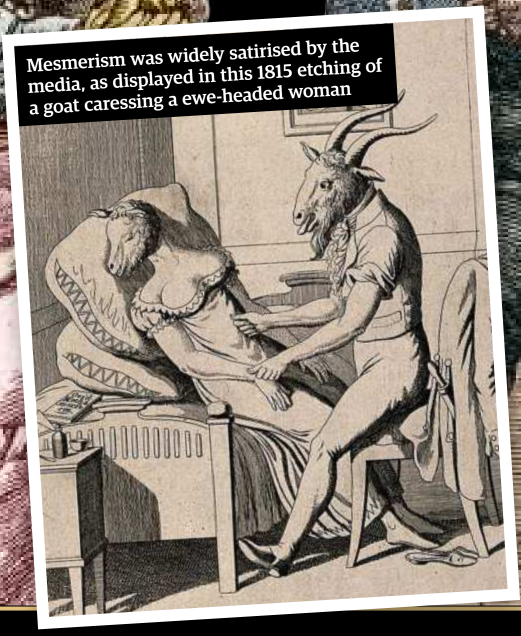


ANIMAL
MAGNETISM,
VINDICATED AND PROVED.
MR. C. HOLMES,
LECTURE,
MESMERISM,
CHELMSFORD,
FRIDAY NEXT, JULY 14,

A collection of handbills advertising mesmerism, found in one of the many unique scrapbooks of Theodosius Purland



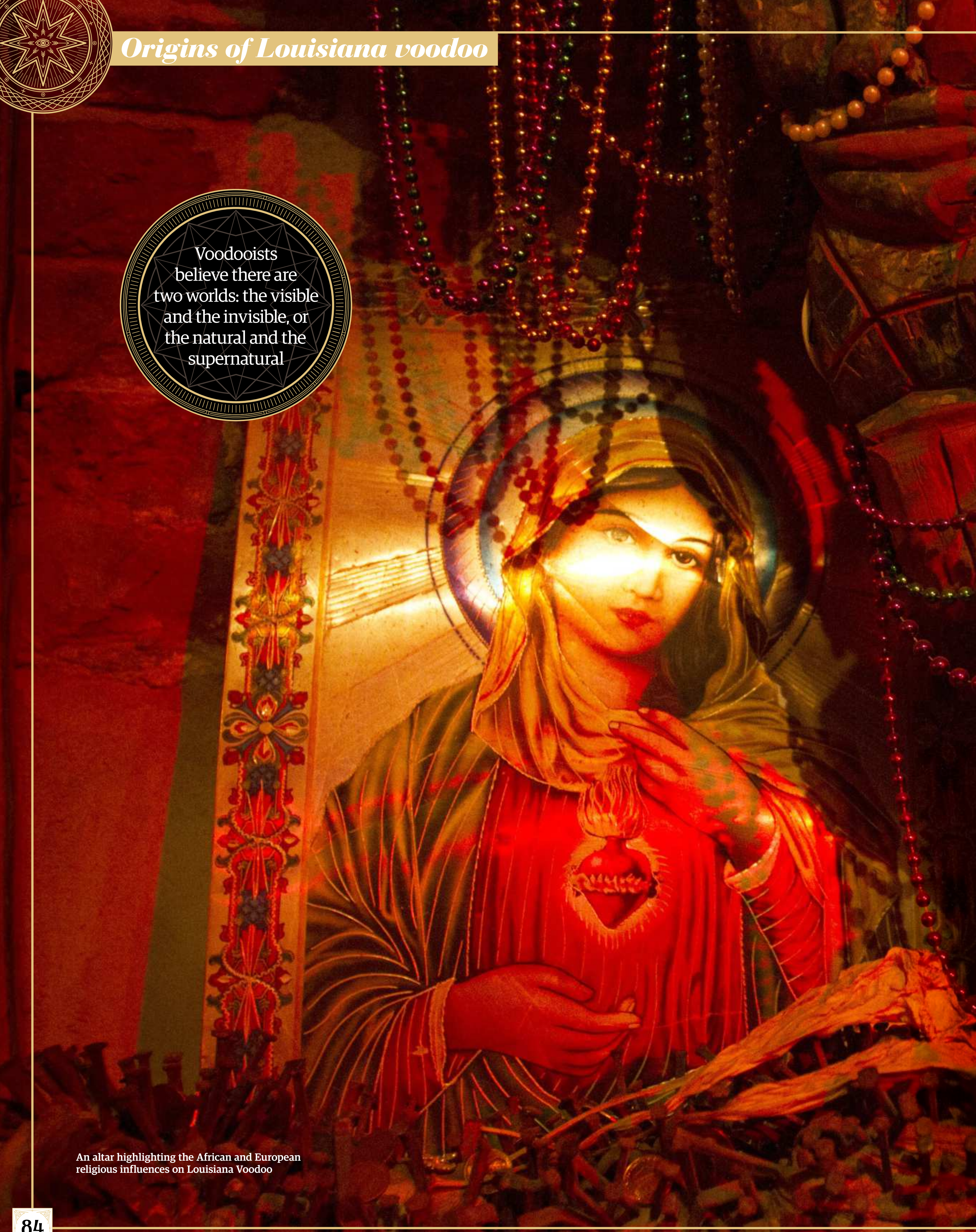
Portrait of German physician Franz Mesmer, who developed and practiced mesmerism



Mesmerism was widely satirised by the media, as displayed in this 1815 etching of a goat caressing a ewe-headed woman

© Alamy, Getty Images

Voodooists believe there are two worlds: the visible and the invisible, or the natural and the supernatural



An altar highlighting the African and European religious influences on Louisiana Voodoo

Origins of Louisiana voodoo

Louisiana voodoo is an offshoot from Haitian vodou, the older West African vodun, and is distinguished by its own set of specific innovations and rituals

Written by Martyn Conterio

New Orleans is an American city unlike any other. Famous for its cuisine, music and festivals, in the late-20th century it came to be known widely as 'the Big Easy', reflecting the locals' penchant for a good time and unruffled nature. But New Orleans' past as a centre for the slave trade and its lurid associations with voodoo - many think it an evil cult - means the Crescent City (another nickname bestowed upon the place) boasts a darkness few other cities in the nation can match. Chicago and New York had their gangsters, Los Angeles its movie stars, but New Orleans boasted a secret world primed by supernatural energy, a land of voodoo kings and queens, people to be respected and sometimes feared. A tormenting hex can be worse than a belly full of lead.

Almost everything we know about voodoo usually comes from films, and Hollywood has been very selective about which aspects of the religion to focus on, misrepresenting rites and rituals as something heathen and blasphemous, sometimes involving human sacrifice, satanic black magic and - in the Haitian version - zombies, those brought back from the grave and forced to work on the plantations and do their master's bidding, their souls trapped, their bodies controlled by a wicked bokor. Voodoo as represented in the movies is tantamount to devil-worshipping. The secretive bayou setting, the rhythmic pounding of drums, the crackle of torchlight, shadowed bodies swaying in blasphemous displays of demonic possession, led fevered imaginations to interpret these things as sacrilegious rites. In Christian minds, voodoo is satanic and closely associated with witchcraft, necromancy and other black arts. HP Lovecraft wrote in *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928), that the sinister cult at the centre of his tale was "more diabolic than even the blackest of the African voodoo circles." Very often, voodoo's political and spiritual roots are ignored in favour of racist prejudice and plain ignorance.

As with Haitian vodou, Louisiana voodoo's roots lie in the grotesque slave trade and the African diaspora. Forcibly exiled from their homelands and treated as subhuman, they were

Baron Samedi

Baron Samedi is one of – if not the most – iconic of voodoo spirits, partly thanks to a character named Baron Samedi in the James Bond adventure, *Live and Let Die* (1973), the lwa's extravagant look and the vital role he plays in the vodou religion. Haitian dictator, François Duvalier, aka Papa Doc, imitated characteristics of the underworld god, such as speaking in a nasal tone and always wearing black and sporting sunglasses, to keep his subjects frightened and in the spooky belief he was Baron Samedi incarnate.

Samedi guards over the underworld and the souls of the dead. He greets the dead and takes them to Guinee. There is no hell in vodou, only a kind of waiting room (Guinee), which souls must pass through, before being reunited with their ancestors. Samedi – named after the French word for Saturday – is known for his love of rude jokes, being a bit of a trickster and a liking for cigars and white rum. With his top hat, cane and skeleton face, he cuts an imposing figure, though he is not malevolent.

Samedi is syncretised with 'St Expedite', a saint of murky origins, who has an association with Mardi Gras, though Baron Samedi and St Expedite are not syncretised in Haitian vodou.

Baron Samedi figurine on sale in a shop in New Orleans

worked to death, discarded and replenished with a new intake. The South – a landscape bewitched by gothic atmosphere and moods – is permanently haunted by the ghosts of the plantations' dead and their extraordinary legacy is Louisiana voodoo, a greatly misunderstood religion like its equally infamous cousin.

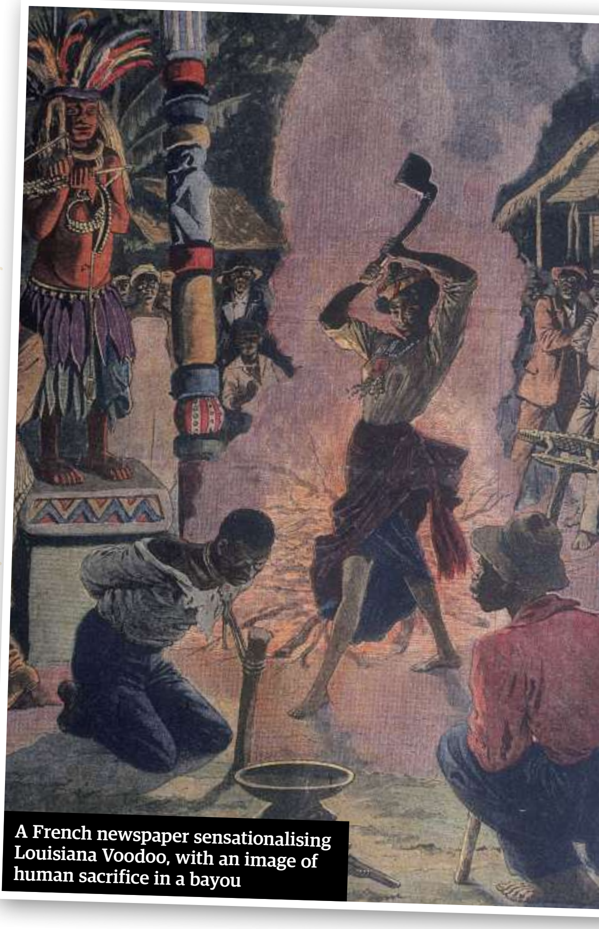
Founded in 1718 by the French, New Orleans became a pawn in European empire manoeuvrings. The Spanish eventually took it from France and the British even attempted an invasion. Due to the Saint-Domingue slave revolt of 1791 and the founding of the first black western republic (Haiti in 1804), the French led by Napoleon Bonaparte, worried about war with the British, abandoned the former colony and then sold New Orleans and a gigantic tract of territory stretching from the Gulf of Mexico to southern Canada. The 1803 Louisiana Purchase brought New Orleans into the fold of the United States, but European and African influence left its mark in the people, architecture, language and religion. For instance, the city gave admittance to gens de couleur libre (free people of colour), meaning African culture and vodou grew exponentially and formed a specific part of the melting pot culture. The celebrated birthplace and home of jazz, the port was also the entry point into US lands for African and Afro-Caribbean slaves, who, like some gens de couleur libre, brought with them the syncretic religion known as Haitian vodou, a system of ancient rites and beliefs which intermingled with exposure to Roman Catholicism. Haiti is the most famous voodoo-practising country on the planet. As the saying goes: the country is 85 per cent Roman Catholic and 110 per cent vodou. The island's history has coursed a sad trajectory from heaven on Earth to poverty-stricken hell, due to centuries of political strife.

Because African rituals were forbidden and seen as a threat (slave owners feared vodou), practitioners found in Roman Catholic iconography and teachings a way to incorporate western religion into their own ancient belief system. If caught in worship, they were whipped. If they prayed during the whipping, owners were even more incensed – fearing a curse – and sometimes killed them outright (or threatened to). In South Carolina, a 1739 uprising by Congolese slaves led to reprisals by lawmakers. Although vodou played no significant role in the rebellion, the 'Negro Act of 1740' banned drums, horn and 'other loud instruments', the kinds of equipment used in ceremonies. Slaves were also forbidden to learn to write or congregate in groups.

Vodou dates further back in time than the 2,000-year-old story of Jesus Christ – to 6,000 years – with its origins in vodun, a complex religion of West African countries such as Benin (where vodun is the state religion). Vodun has its root in the word 'vodu', translated in the Fon language as 'spirit'. With regional variations, the Fon, Ewe, Yoruba people of west Africa believe in Nana Buluku – the divine creator – with her two sons, Lisa and Mawu, represent the sun and moon.

> Iwa are contacted and consulted for advice by practitioners and worshippers who are seeking guidance in their lives

> "Vodou dates further back in time than the story of Jesus Christ – to 6,000 years"



A French newspaper sensationalising Louisiana Voodoo, with an image of human sacrifice in a bayou

Unlike Christian teachings of God, Nana Buluku is seen as unknowable, leaving human trials and tribulations to be overseen by vodou (spirits), and there are numerous assortments to worship. Vodun and its Caribbean and American offspring do not recognise a distinction between what we might call the sacred and the profane, between the natural and supernatural, or select groups (clergy). Anybody can communicate with the spirits, after undergoing the required learning.

At a glance, vodun looks to be diametrically opposed to forming any kinship with Roman Catholicism. The cosmology of vodun – with its myriad spirits (known as loas or lwas) seems totally at odds with Catholic teachings about heaven and hell, salvation or damnation. Vodun, Haitian vodou and, by extension, Louisiana voodoo is far more interested in a cyclical relationship between life and death, with a focus on metempsychosis (the transmigration of the soul). In Catholic tradition, possession by spirits is seen as an evil interaction and a direct assault and threat upon a person's soul, whereas in vodun, Haitian vodou and the Louisiana version, it's a key focal aspect of the ritual and ceremony, a way of channelling and communing with ancestors, the possessed person consciously allowing the spirit in. There is no fear of the dead. The lwa who divines access between spirits and worshippers is Papa La-Bas (syncretised with St. Peter). From the horrors of slavery sprung an attempt to reclaim a culture and heritage. The coast of western and central Africa was prime hunting ground for slave traders. Once clasped in irons and shipped thousands of miles across the Atlantic, attempts were made by slavers to dehumanise people, by robbing them of individuality and freedom. Slave owners thought allowing workers to keep hold of their traditions and culture would possibly lead to rebellion and uprising. The development of vodun into Haitian vodou allowed slaves to take part in their heritage and culture,

> Iwa are connected or associated with a natural power source, such as water deity, Yemaya

Congo Square and voodoo

Early 19th century New Orleans had a municipal code for slaves. It was instigated long before, in the 18th century, by the French, and was continued during the city's Spanish period and after the Louisiana Purchase, and known as the Code Noir. Compared to other parts of the US, Louisiana Creoles were not as strict in enforcing assimilation on slaves, allowing their culture to take root in the city's fabric. One part of this Code Noir allowed slaves Sundays off and by 1817, a patch of land to congregate in, which today lies in the Tremé neighbourhood. This designated area became known as Congo Square.

Every Sunday, slaves and gens de couleur libre would hang out, sell snacks such as deep-fried rice cakes coated in sugar, dance and play drums. The weekly gatherings became an attraction for white citizens and tourists, too, who would look on at the vivid spectacle and marvelled. Although the slaves and others were heavily restricted and monitored, the place thrived and its association with voodoo, legend has it, came about because after the sun sank low, voodooists would gather – led by grand dame Marie Laveau – to commence and partake in rituals.

To this day, Congo Square remains a focal point for African-American culture and celebration while creating a new form of worship based on exposure to Catholicism. Here, then, religious belief was also an act of political defiance.

As vodun is monotheistic, the new syncretic vision was indeed compatible (despite a legion of differences) with Roman Catholicism's belief in one god. Loas - and their function as figures to offer prayers to - were akin to the Catholic saints, so the switch wasn't too difficult. With no scriptures or artefacts, vodun was developed clandestinely and served as psychological relief and a prime source of spiritual strength to slaves. Vodun, Haitian vodou and Louisiana voodoo are essentially about healing and experiences of transcendence. The emphasis is on rituals, incorporating song and dance into proceedings. The body is a medium and vessel for communing with lwas and the dead.

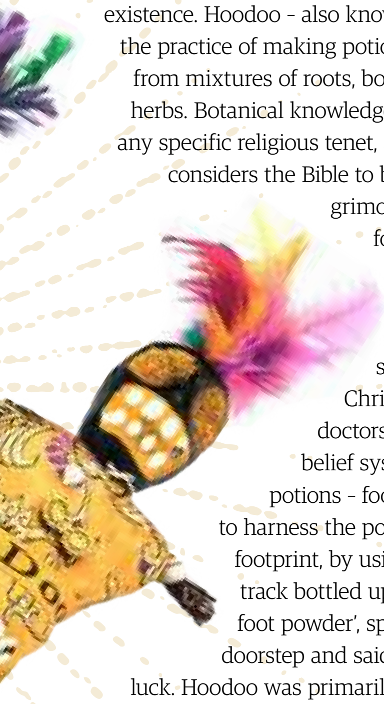
Vodun spread and entered different territories, other Caribbean islands, the coast of South America and mainland USA, the variations in rituals and beliefs allowed for distinct regional offshoots to come into fruition. In Haiti, creators such as Nzambi or Nana Buluku became Bondye (based on the French 'Bon Dieu' meaning good god) and the loas became known as lwas, the spirits becoming a mythology involving warring nations and families. These lwas have connections to Roman Catholic saints, such as snake deity Li Grand Zombi's association with Saint Patrick. This latter figure - Li Grand Zombi - would have a major role, when Haitian vodou spread to - New Orleans and Louisiana, transforming into 'voodoo'. One piece of paraphernalia, above all others, was seized upon as an abomination with exclusively malevolent intentions: the voodoo doll.

There is a historical basis for the voodoo doll's bad reputation, though one subsequently aggrandised. Associated with curses, manipulation and bad vibes, this totem springs from the Fon people of Benin and has been linked to Kongo's nkisi (plural: minkisi), which means "things which do things". Minkisi are containers housing spirits of the dead and can be used by the living for a host of reasons (including harming people). In Haitian vodou, these figurines are known as pwen. Voodoo dolls became a prominent - if misunderstood - icon in Louisiana voodoo in large part due to the most famous voodoo queen of all: Marie Laveau, a devout Catholic and voodoo practitioner who helped the religion take some interesting turns.

As voodoo made landfall in North America, Native American influences, European black magic

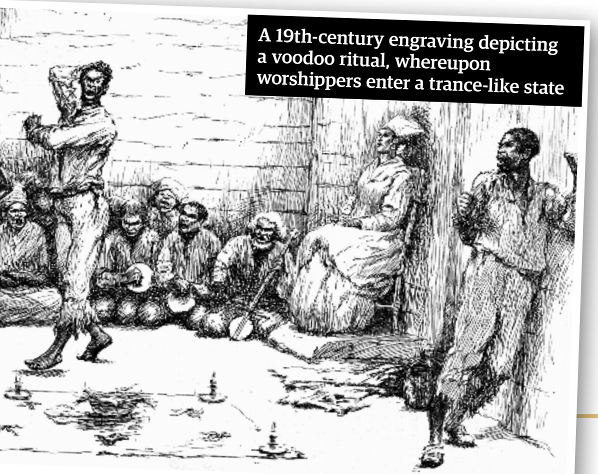
Voodoo dolls and their function in the religion have been greatly abused by Hollywood movies

A window display in the famous French Quarter in New Orleans, showing the crass commercialisation of voodoo



and Louisiana folklore left their mark on the religion, bringing what is known as hoodoo into existence. Hoodoo - also known as rootwork - is the practice of making potions and charms from mixtures of roots, bodily fluids and herbs. Botanical knowledge essentially trumps any specific religious tenet, although hoodoo considers the Bible to be the best available grimoire (a book of spells) for its followers, and the practice is founded in the slave trade and slaves' exposure to Christianity. Hoodoo doctors created their own belief system from all sorts of potions - foot track magic, said to harness the power of a person's footprint, by using dirt from the track bottled up and buried, or 'hot foot powder', sprinkled on a target's doorstep and said to bring them bad luck. Hoodoo was primarily practised by Afro-Americans, and is connected to and based on the older vodun.

Marie Laveau became a powerful and influential figure in New Orleans, developing and promoting the traditions into the wider community, including the white elites of society. She is responsible for the boom in the voodoo doll, the religion's move into superstition, the use of gris gris (a West African Wolof word for a talisman which brings the wearer luck and protects them from harm), worship of Li Grand Zombi (not to be confused with zombies, it's a snake god, the serpent represents the spiritual balance between genders, between sacred knowledge and worship). The origin of the name has been attributed to Marie Laveau's python - Zombi - but there are arguments it springs from the Bantu word 'Nzambi' - the serpent deity. Either way, boa constrictors became part of the theatre of Louisiana voodoo.



A 19th-century engraving depicting a voodoo ritual, whereupon worshippers enter a trance-like state

> "Marie Laveau became a powerful and influential figure in New Orleans"

Unlike in Benin and other parts of Africa where slave traders plundered the populous, once vodun reached the Caribbean and America, women became involved in rituals. In Haiti, they are known as Hougans (men) and Mambos (women). In Louisiana voodoo, this transformed into the kings and queens of voodoo, who became not just priests and priestess of their religion, but people to whom congregations looked for spells and potions, as well as respected community leaders. Doctor John (also known as Bayou John) was another famous 19th-century voodooist said to have mentored Laveau. Both these historical figures were renowned in their time and lived during New Orleans voodoo's heyday - between 1820-1860.

John was a tattooed former slave and sailor from Senegal, whose 'powers' involved resurrection and healing. It is said he could heal those on the verge of death. Born in 1937, Fred Staten moved from Haiti to New Orleans and styled himself Papa Midnite, crafting a stage routine which featured him biting the heads off live chickens during rituals, earning the sobriquet 'Chicken Man'. The commercialisation of Haitian vodou and Louisiana voodoo ended up a racket praying upon gullible folk and in New Orleans has become primarily a must-experience thing for tourists. Sales in mojos, gris gris and charm bags known as ouanga became a means of easy money at extortionate sums. It's a long time since the controversial Marie Laveau commanded huge audiences in Congo Square or the shoreline of Lake Pontchartrain, said to be in their thousands.

How many identify their religion as New Orleans/Louisiana voodoo today is in the thousands at most, maybe two or three per cent of citizens, and mostly centred around the 7th ward. Away from the tourist traps and sensationalist movies, there remain those who take voodoo seriously and respectfully. The founding of the Voodoo Spiritual Temple in 1990 served to carry on the traditions handed down, showcasing the great spirituality at the heart of vodou and reclaimed it from decades of misinformation, propaganda and lies.

> Voodoo does not have a chief spiritual leader, main holy site, any sacred texts nor religious artefacts

Voodoo's musical influence

References to Louisiana voodoo and hoodoo appeared early on in blues tunes by Robert Johnson, a guitarist and singer said to have sold his soul at a crossroads. Yet is might be surprising to discover voodoo has influenced not just jazz and the blues, but everything from rock 'n' roll to heavy metal. Audiences screamed with delight and some were outraged, when Elvis Presley swayed his hips with abandon, or the times Jerry Lee Lewis smashed the keys of piano like he was possessed. In a way, they were very much possessed, by the rhythm of the beat and the energy conjured by music, giving in to the primal urge to let go and lose oneself to dance. Music theorists and anthropologists have noted vodou's debt to 20th century pop, and the origin of the word 'rock' - as in rock music - itself is derived from the West African 'rak'.

Blues musicians such as Muddy Waters were influenced southern church groups, and this fed into the era of white boys taking the blues and transforming it into rock, with famed guitarists Eric Clapton, Keith Richards and others constantly name-checking the Deep South as its inspiration. Screamin' Jay Hawkins went one step further, by incorporating voodoo imagery into his act, and wrote a hoodoo-themed classic, *I Put a Spell on You*. We've vodou to thank for rock stars going wild on stage and embracing the beat with a fervour with echoes of religiosity to it. The rock star is much like the voodoo king or queen leading the congregation.

Screamin' Jay Hawkins incorporated voodoo imagery into his live act

© Alamy, Getty Images, Creative Commons, Mark Benecke

Marie Laveau

The voodoo queen

New Orleans' most famous daughter reigned over the city for decades, with both rich and poor seeking her mystic counsel

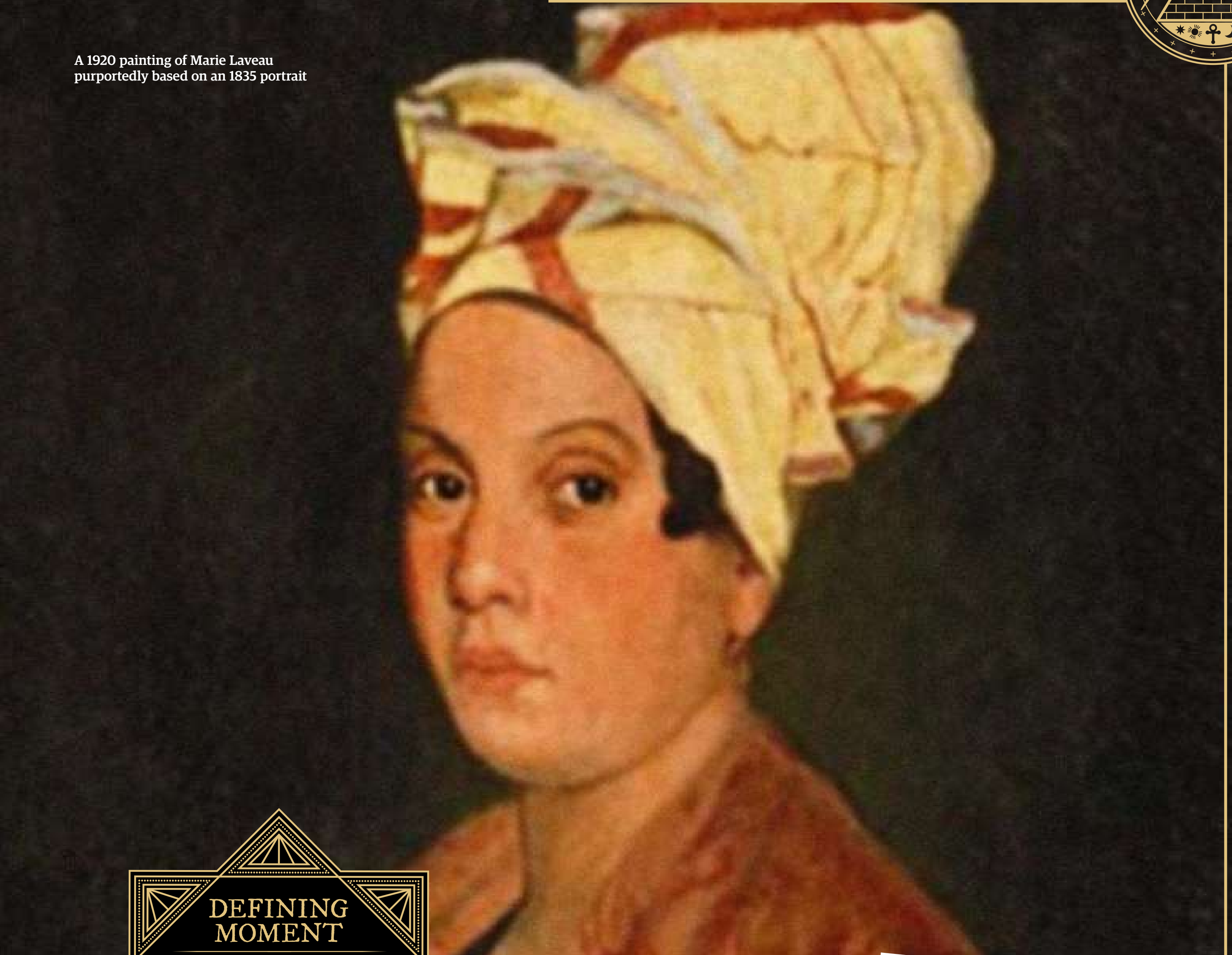
Written by Martyn Conterio

Marie Laveau wasn't just born in New Orleans; during the syncretic religion's heyday between the 1820s and 1860s she *was* New Orleans. No other citizen in the port city's 300-year existence has so represented the unique and mysterious vibe of the town, nor gripped the public's imagination.

Although her biography is littered with contradictions and codswallop due to a lack of verifiable information, this has only served to keep the flame of Marie Laveau burning in the Big Easy. So much of her life story is wrapped up in legend, fabrication and the unknowable that even her birth year is disputed. Generally given as either 1794 or 1801, the *New York Times*' 1881 obituary marked her age at death as 98, meaning she must have been born way, way back in 1783 (10 September is recognised as Laveau's birthday.)

The doyenne of voodoo is an important icon of the Crescent City. Her family tomb is visited by throngs of people led by tour guides, tributes are left at her gravesite and the reputed location of her ramshackle cottage at Rue St Ann, in the French Quarter, a humble abode built by early settlers from wood, is commemorated with a plaque. How Marie Laveau rose to prominence is a fascinating, albeit murky confluence of religion, race, class, society and power.

Born to a white man named Charles Laveau (a Creole plantation owner) and his mixed-race mistress, Marguerite Darcantel, said to be



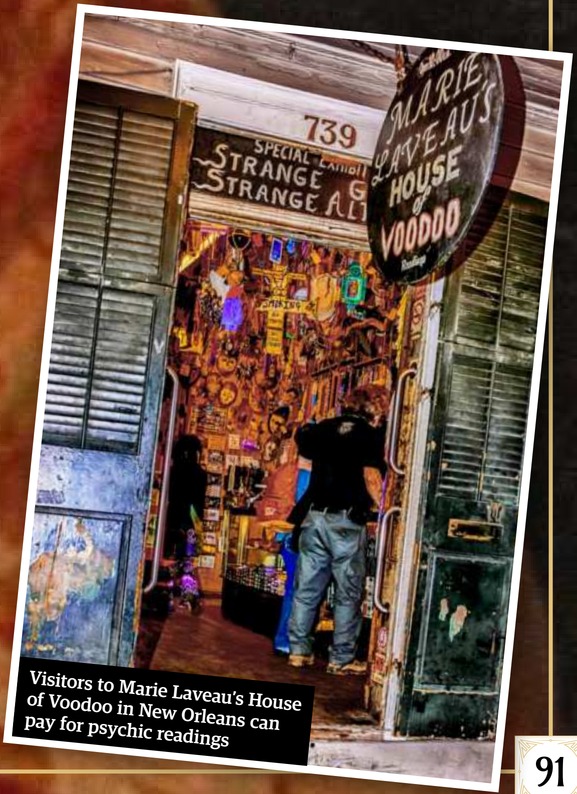
A 1920 painting of Marie Laveau purportedly based on an 1835 portrait

DEFINING MOMENT

First association with voodoo

The first recorded instance of Marie Laveau and voodoo comes from a newspaper report about a complaint made to the courts regarding a raid on a voodoo ceremony and the taking by the police of a ceremonial statue. The report does highlight a connection between Laveau, voodoo and her position in New Orleans as a community leader and highly respected voodoo expert.

c1850


739
SPECIAL EXHIBIT
STRANGE
STRANGE
MARIE LAVEAU'S HOUSE of VOODOO

Visitors to Marie Laveau's House of Voodoo in New Orleans can pay for psychic readings

> "In this decade she may have developed intimate knowledge of voodoo and rootwork (also known as conjure)"

Li Grand Zombi Ritual

Li Grand Zombi is a major figure of veneration in Louisiana voodoo who came to prominence during the reign of Marie Laveau. It is claimed to also have been the name of Marie Laveau's pet snake (described as either a boa constrictor or ball python – the latter being the more likely), which she thought would aid in the theatre of her ceremony. The serpent took part in one of her famous dancing rituals, held every year at night on St John's Eve (23 June) in the bayous or on the shoreline at nearby Lake Pontchartrain.

Laveau would take Li Grand Zombi out of a box, let it lick her face (from which she drew power), stand on the box and pass on the snake's power to her eager followers. Into a cooking pot, voodooists would throw offerings – anything from food to animals – as Laveau chanted, 'L'Appe vini, le Grand Zombi, L'Appe vini, pou fe gris-gris!' (He is coming, the great zombie, he is coming to make gris-gris charms). Other times, she would declare the more unnerving, 'L'appe vini, pou fair mourir!' (He is coming to kill).

A male participant would then hand a small coffin to Laveau, and the contents of the boiling cauldron would be passed around and supped.

In voodoo and its older incarnations, the serpent is a holy creature, the reverse of Christianity's teaching about snakes

Choctaw Native American and African, Marie grew up uneducated but free from the perils and horrors of slavery. The famous 1835 portrait of the voodoo queen as a middle-aged adult shows her as light-skinned and wearing an African tignon (head covering). Yet there are arguments over the accuracy of the painting. Described as beautiful and alluring, some people who knew her in life said she could pass for white, while others claimed she was dark-skinned. It almost goes without saying that it cannot have been both.

In 1823, she married a fellow 'gens de couleur libre' (free person of colour) named Jacques Paris, who came to America via the influx of Saint-Domingue (Haitian) free men, slaves and traders fleeing the uprising and battles against colonial France. Paris and Laveau were wed at St Louis Cathedral by Pere Antoine (a Spanish Capuchin friar named Antonio de Sedella who became an equally revered figure in the city and close friend to Laveau). Settling in the French Quarter a year into the marriage, Paris vanished one day without a trace, leaving his new wife perplexed as to his whereabouts. She insisted that he had died and not walked out on her. Paris never was located…

Her next union was more rewarding and successful. With Paris out of the picture, a year later, in 1824, she was domiciled in common law marriage with Captain Christophe Dominique Glapion, with whom she would stay until his death in 1855. During their marriage Laveau gave birth to 15 children, though sadly nearly all of them died from yellow fever or other outbreaks that plagued New Orleans due to the city's poor standard of sanitation and terrible living conditions.

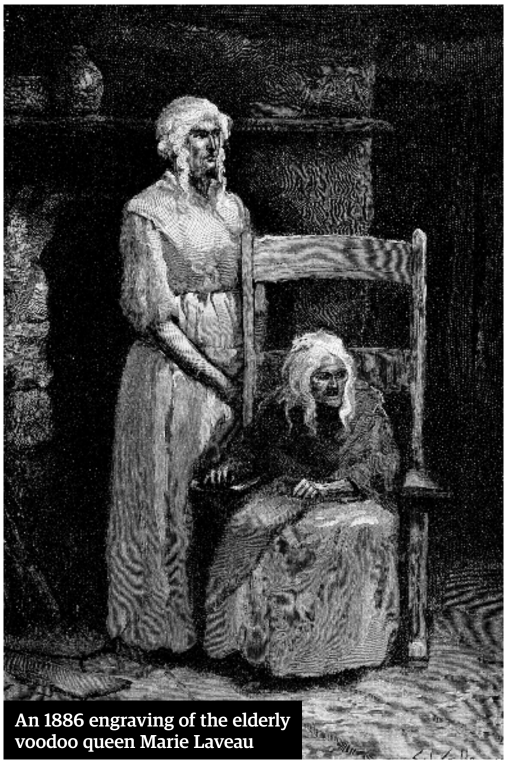
It is also in this period – the 1820s – that Laveau is believed to have started her ascent to the top.

DEFINING MOMENT

Death of second husband

Laveau's second husband died, leaving her and the surviving children in a perilous financial spot. The house she lived in was purchased for $1,800 by a relative, who let it to her for free, so avoiding homelessness. This bit of biography is intriguing because of all the stories about the avaricious voodoo queen acquiring vast sums selling gris-gris and fortune-telling.

1855



An 1886 engraving of the elderly voodoo queen Marie Laveau

In various narratives, it is claimed she was tutored by such noted figures associated with the city's underground religion as Dr John, the medicine man and ex-slave, and Marie Saloppe, who later became somebody to cast aside, something Laveau did quite viciously in order to send a message to others thinking about usurping her. How accurate this is account is remains unknown, though detractors have picked up on Dr John's success in selling trinkets to white folk as being the impetus for Laveau to try her hand at it too.

In this decade she may have developed intimate knowledge of voodoo and rootwork (also known as conjure) and, despite her harsh treatment of rival kings and queens, Laveau cultivated a public persona for kind-heartedness and virtuous acts. For the next 30 or more years Laveau popularised voodoo among New Orleans citizens, both rich and poor, all the while remaining a devout Catholic. Was she, then, a legitimate religious figure or a scam artist looking to bleed gullible types of a buck or two?

Laveau's occupation as a hairdresser put her in a unique position. From local gossip to insider info on the echelons of New Orleans elites (gleaned via their pliable servants), the voodoo queen was able to learn everybody's business and use it to her advantage. As a pillar of the community and icon to the superstitious, she became the go-to person for advice, spells and potions.

In terms of the development in Louisiana voodoo, Laveau promoted Catholic icons, incense and prayers alongside African-based totems such as the use of gris-gris (charms) and voodoo dolls. She sold mojos and other trinkets supposedly imbued with voodoo powers.

The New York Times obituary described the cottage on Rue St Ann as 'quaint', with a broken fence and trees drooping over the property, as if at any moment branches would pierce the abode and send it crumbling, the author painting a picture of humbleness bordering on destitution. Laveau, though, received her guests with pomp, cooking for them and making sure their ills and worries were listened to with a sympathetic ear or banished with magic, which seems a world away from lurid newspaper stories of naked dancing, serpent worship and satanic hexes. What ultimately emerges from Laveau's success as both agony aunt and voodoo queen was her personal charm and skills in dealing with people from all walks of life.

DEFINING MOMENT

The voodoo queen bows out

When Marie Laveau passed away in June 1881, the *New York Times* noted that she was a mystery even in her life: "Although Marie Laveau's history has been very much sought after, it has never been published. [...] The secrets of her life, however, could only be obtained by the old lady herself, but she would never tell the smallest part of what she knew."

1881

Another facet of Laveau's popularity – which was by no means all-encompassing, as many feared as much as liked her, according to legend – were her excursions to nurse people during outbreaks of cholera and yellow fever (diseases which killed her own kids). This voodoo Florence Nightingale act even extended to visiting condemned men in prison. Yet she commanded respect too. Children were kept in line by mention of her name, as if she was the bogeyman, and it was known around New Orleans that Laveau knew everybody's dirty little secrets and where bodies were figuratively buried, gathering the information seemingly by a mixture of bullying servants with voodoo threats or plain old bribery. How she made gains from this knowledge is unknown, as she lived her life in the hovel on Rue St Ann and was hardly living it up in one of the city's grand Spanish mansions.

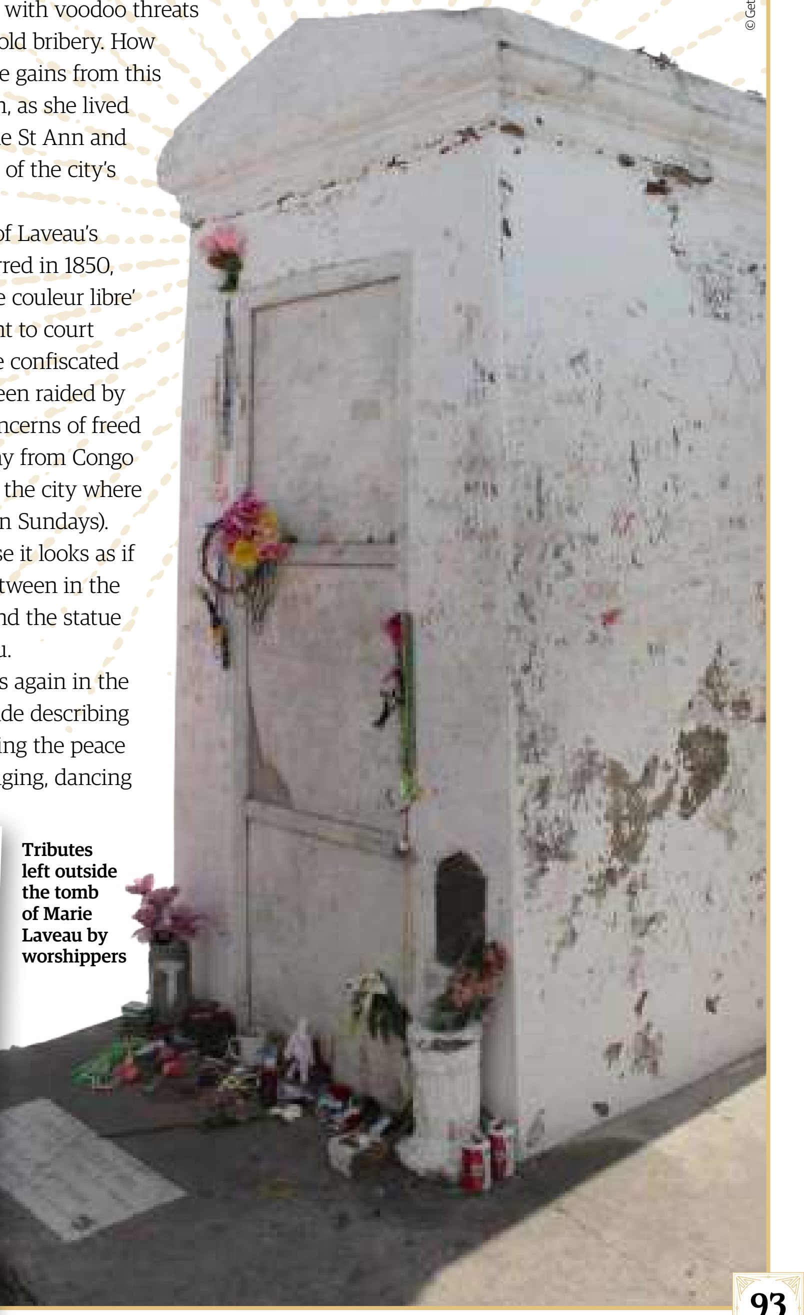
The first recorded instance of Laveau's connection with voodoo occurred in 1850, when she and a fellow 'gens de couleur libre' named Rosine Dominique went to court to ask for the return of a statue confiscated during a ritual, one that had been raided by the law because there were concerns of freed people mixing with slaves away from Congo Square (the designated spot in the city where they were allowed to mingle on Sundays). The report is intriguing because it looks as if Laveau was serving as a go-between in the community. A fine was paid and the statue returned, though not to Laveau.

In 1859, she made the papers again in the city when a complaint was made describing her as a 'hag' who was disturbing the peace with her voodoo rituals. As singing, dancing and drumming were involved, there would certainly have been a lot of noise.

Holy figure or charlatan who used blackmail more than black magic to get her way? Laveau was and always will be a controversial figure. Folk to this day leave offerings of beads, booze and flowers at the tomb of Laveau, in St Louis cemetery #1. In the second cemetery, St Louis #2, there is a crypt known as the Voodoo Vault, which is also believed to be her resting, though quite how the rumour started is unknown, as the resting place is most definitely to be the one in cemetery #1, marked 'Famille Vve. Paris/née Laveau'. Xs are made with red brick, left as part of a devotional message and request for Laveau to make their wishes come true. However, voodooists consider the act disrespectful and damaging to the crypt's structure. Even so, these small acts of devotion are a powerful testament to Laveau's legacy in the Big Easy.

New Orleans writer Robert Tallant visits the tomb of Laveau

American Horror Story costume worn by Angela Bassett as Marie Laveau



Tributes left outside the tomb of Marie Laveau by worshippers

© Getty Images, Creative Commons; Dan Soto

Tarot

From the Chariot and the Hanged Man to Death, the Tower and the Devil, can you really play your cards right with the tarot?

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

The origins of tarot cards were quite innocent: they first became popular as playing cards in the 15th century, designed to play games like Italian tarocchini and French tarot. It wasn't until the late 18th century that they earned their current reputation, their link to the occult, when they started being used for the art of divination, specifically in the newly popular forms of tarotology and cartomancy.

> Tarot cards first arrived in Europe in the bags of Islamic soldiers as they invaded Italy, Sicily and Spain in the 16th century

Through interpreting the illustrations on tarot cards, many people believe that tarot diviners, commonly known as 'readers', can gain insight into the past, present and future. There are several theories behind the workings of using the cards to tell fortunes. Some believe the results to the questions posted by the reader are guided by a spiritual force. Others believe the cards have the power to tap into the human collective unconscious, or the subject's own creative unconscious.

Those interested in occult activities saw the tarot as something exciting and revolutionary. Those that feared it saw it as an instrument for the Devil. Tarot divination became popular among occultists when the French started to develop the idea that the cards carried mystical properties. In 1781, Antoine Court de Gébelin published a dissertation on the idea that the tarot design was based on ancient Egyptian religious texts, featuring the likes of Isis, Osiris and Typhon, and therefore carried deep divine significance. Since Court de Gébelin's dissertation, historians have discovered that none of his ideas regarding the links between ancient Egypt and the tarot were true.

French occultist Etteilla, the pseudonym of Jean-Baptiste Alliette, became the first to assign divinatory meaning to the cards with the Tarot of Marseilles deck (different kinds of decks were available in different regions), which contained themes relating to ancient Egypt. In 1783, he devised a proper method of tarot divination, created the first Egyptian tarot to be used exclusively for tarot cartomancy, and formed the first occultist tarot society for enthusiasts.

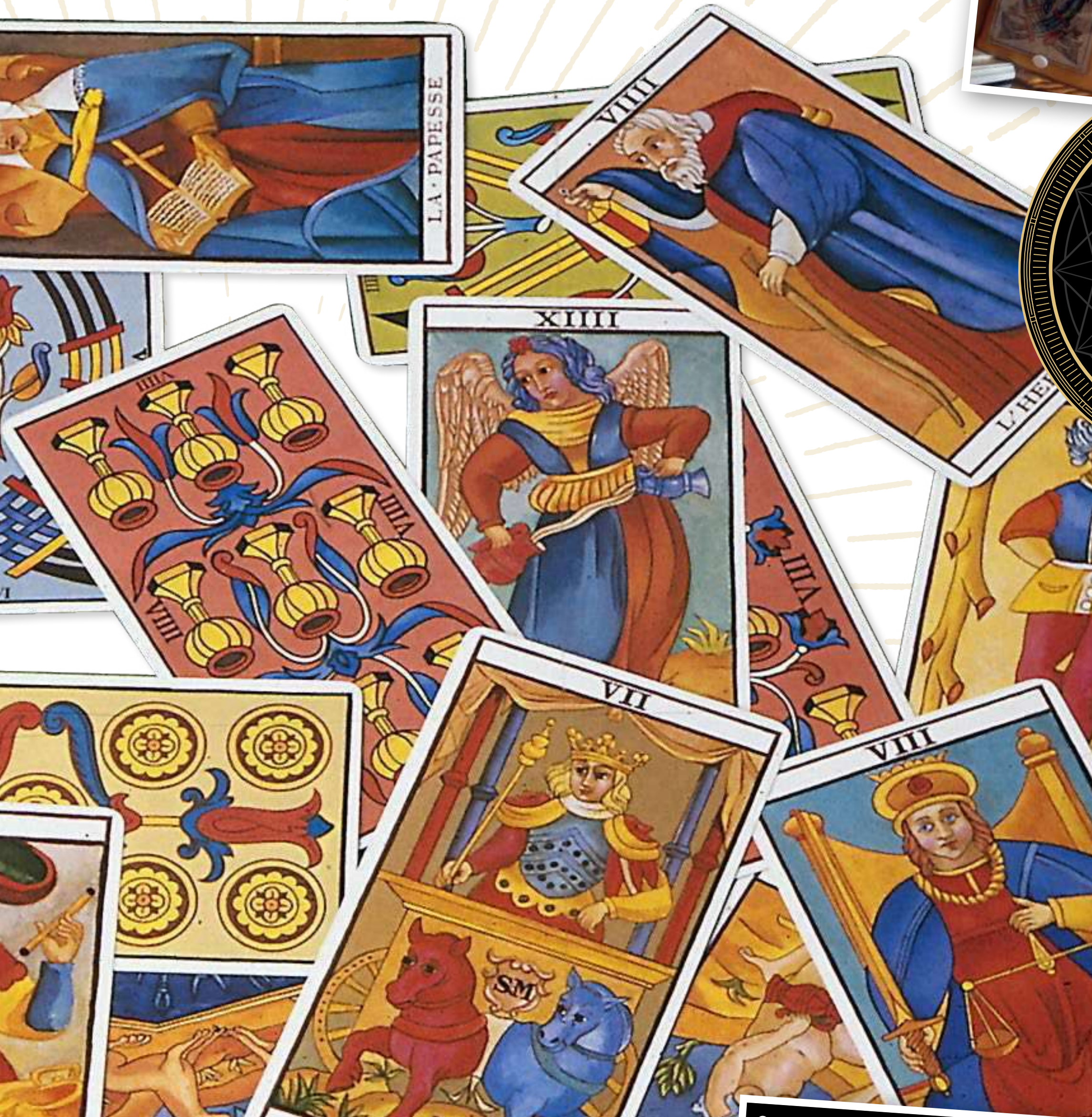
Taking inspiration from Etteilla's work, Marie Anne Lenormand became the first bona fide tarot reader for people in high places, including Empress Josephine and Napoleon, and quickly shot to fame within the community. As tarot cards became more popular and spread from France to other countries and cultures, the system was being updated constantly. Disputes regarding certain cards' meanings are even continuing to this day. Nowadays, there are possibly fewer readers around than when tarot cards first took off, but you still don't have to look to far to find one.

V
LE · PAPE
IIII
L'EMPEREUR
VIIII
I
LE · BATELEU

> "Many people believe that tarot diviners, commonly known as 'readers', can gain insight into the past, present and future"

Many French occultists believed that tarot cards originated from ancient Egyptian theology

The tarot equivalent to a joker card is known as the Fool and marks the beginning of a deck


LA · PAPESSE
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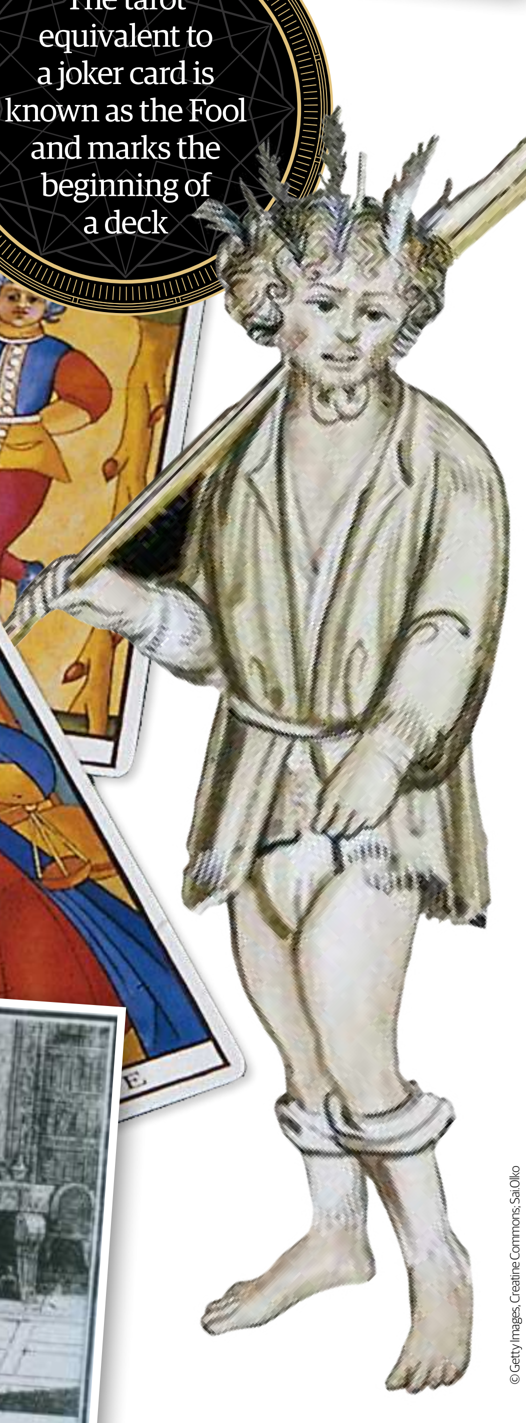
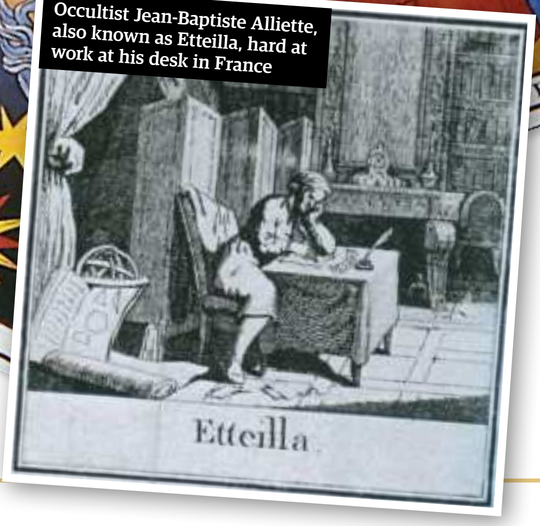
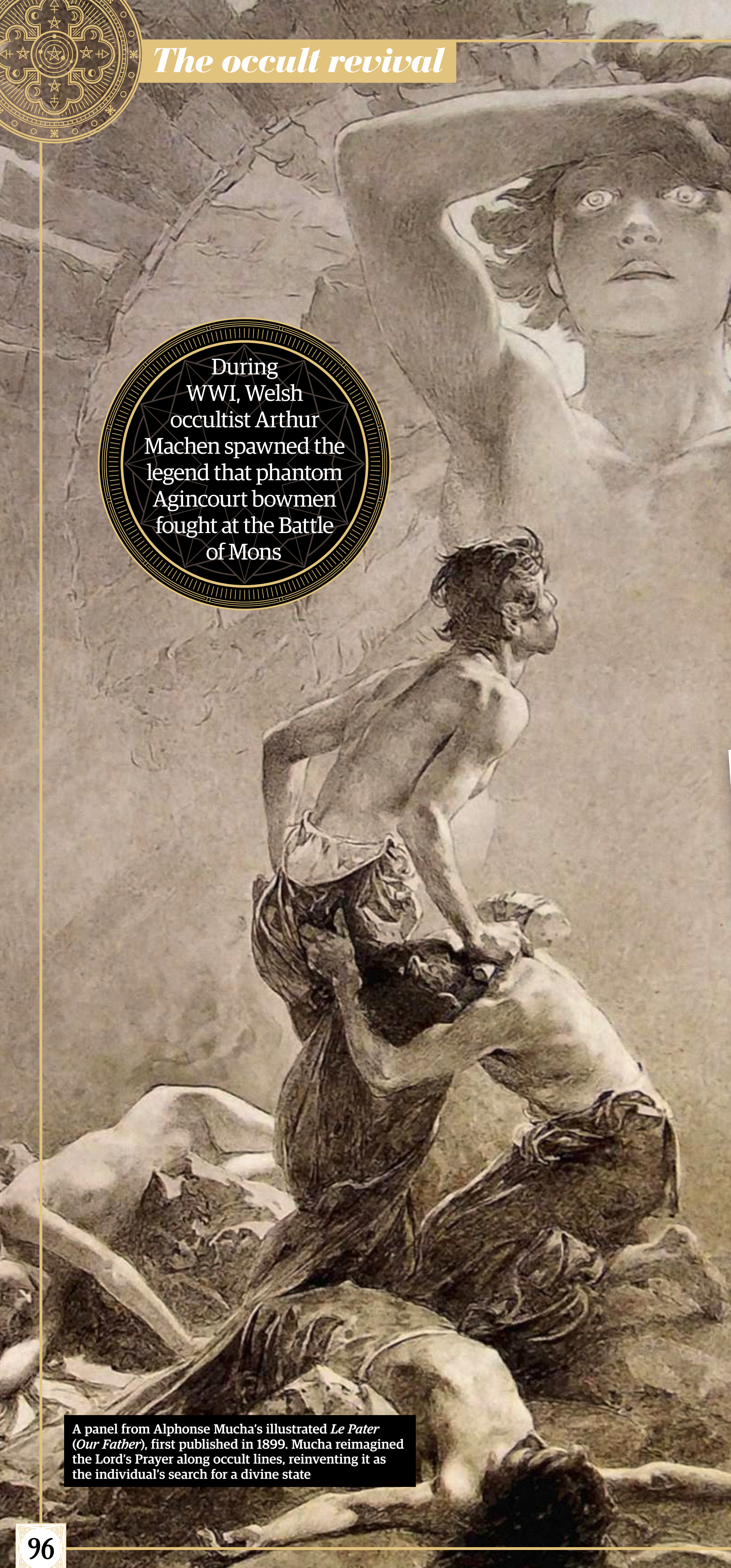
Interpretations of the meaning of individual tarot cards are still disputed to this day





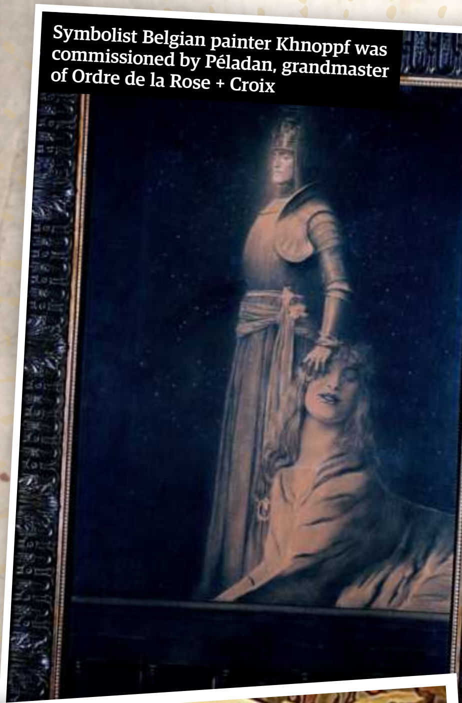
Occultist Jean-Baptiste Alliette, also known as Etteilla, hard at work at his desk in France

© Getty Images, Creatine Commons; Sai.Olko

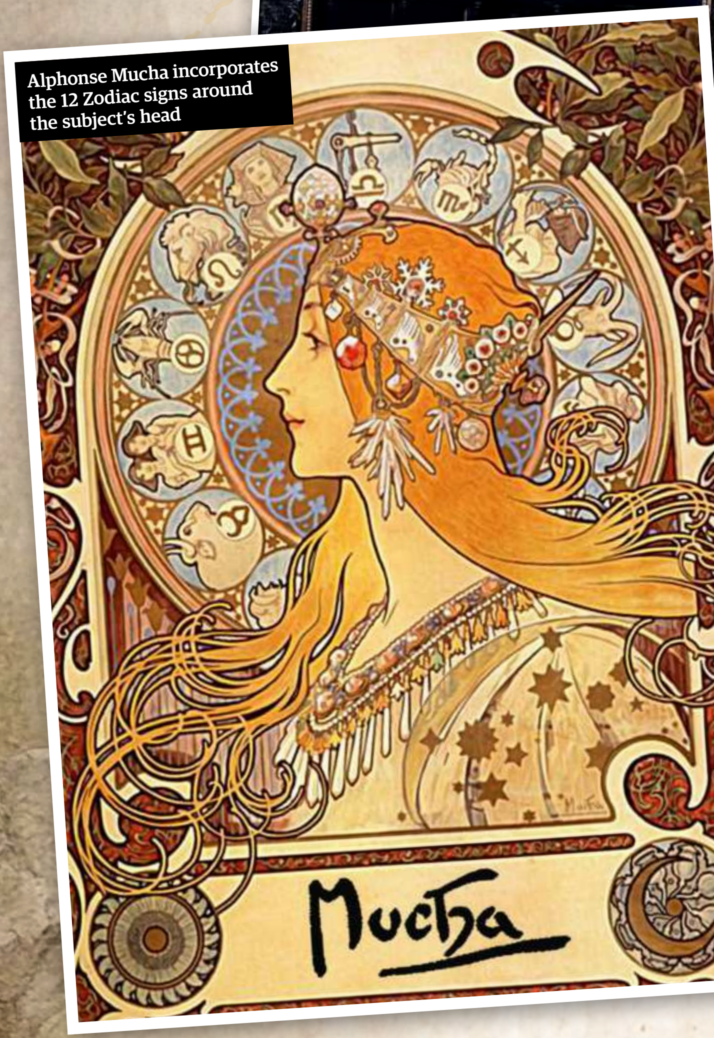


A panel from Alphonse Mucha's illustrated *Le Pater* (*Our Father*), first published in 1899. Mucha reimagined the Lord's Prayer along occult lines, reinventing it as the individual's search for a divine state

During WWI, Welsh occultist Arthur Machen spawned the legend that phantom Agincourt bowmen fought at the Battle of Mons



Symbolist Belgian painter Khnoppf was commissioned by Péladan, grandmaster of Ordre de la Rose + Croix



Alphonse Mucha incorporates the 12 Zodiac signs around the subject's head

The occult revival

As the lights dimmed on the 19th century, faith and progress broke like waves on the anxious, restless mood of the age. The dead reached out to the living, miracle cures were sought, and gurus gathered followers into secret societies

Written by James Hoare

In the summer of 1894, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle found himself in a thatched cottage on the Dorset coast. An old smuggler's haunt, it would have made the perfect seaside getaway, but the great Victorian scribe was here on business.

Appropriately for the creator of Sherlock Holmes, Doyle and his two colleagues, Frank Podmore and Dr Sydney Scott, were here to solve a mystery. They were looking for a ghost.

Like a gaslit *Most Haunted*, the trio set up with a camera and magnesium tripwire, hoping to take a photograph that would expose a spirit where the naked eye could not, but no spectral presence saw fit to glide in front of the lens.

The Symbolist movement was an influence on Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, who used imagery to unlock the unconscious

The following night the family's 20-year-old son came to offer the investigators drinks; when they refused and began to leave, he rushed back in and begged them to stay. Suddenly there was a crashing and banging in the kitchen, as if some malevolent force were flinging open the cupboards in a rage.

The diagnosis: the son did it, with help. But over Doyle's lifetime his telling of the story changed dramatically as he became more enthused with Spiritualism – the belief the dead walk among us and can summoned – and he disowned the official report composed by his more rigorous colleagues at the Society of Psychical Research.

To the 21st century perspective it is contradictory and faintly absurd that the creator of literature's most famous rationalist could be so infamously irrational, but Doyle is a perfect example of the spirit of the age. Born a Roman Catholic and educated by Jesuits, Doyle became agnostic and then ended his life a Spiritualist. He was passionate about vaccination and briefly studied to be an ophthalmologist, but then took all manner of supernatural chicanery as a matter of faith.

The late 19th century was a period of great intellectual restlessness. The French called it 'fin de siècle', which means simply 'end of the century', but captures something that English does not; a sense of pessimism and defeat, uncertainty and frustration, decadence and immorality.

The late 18th century and much of the 19th had been defined by the relentless march of scientific progress, and society had been shaped around it; populations had decamped from the villages to the cities that were bringing new dangers and destroying old ways of life; the centuries-old supremacy of traditional religion had been winded by Charles Darwin, and political thought was dominated by the alarming new creeds of socialism and nationalism.

The social challenges posed by this collision of progress and faith were dealt with in various ways; sometimes by the rejection of one for the other, but also by the creative reconciliation of the two. In fact, the idea that the 18th-century Enlightenment gave way to inevitable secularisation is actually misleading. The truth is that the late 19th century saw belief reborn in surprising new guises.

In France, liberal Catholicism pushed for social reform, while in Britain and the United States muscular Christian activism took to the streets to change the world one tea urn at a time. In the art world, the French Symbolists drew heavily on the gothic imagery of Edgar Allan Poe to reflect imagination and reject realism, while in Germany the bombastic opera of Richard Wagner wove a new Germanic mythology with nationalist undertones and disastrous consequences for the looming 20th century. Secret societies thrived in this space where old identities – whether regional or religious – seemed uncertain.

Many were political, but others took on an occult flavour. The best known of the non-magical bunch were the Freemasons – really just an old boy's network using elaborate rituals as a social bond – who were active across much of Europe and North America, and among Britain's intellectual elite, the Society for Psychical Research stroked their chins and applied (as far as they were concerned) rigorous scientific study to debate the veracity of poltergeists and possessions.

Some secret societies were contemporary reimaginings of older branches of Christian mysticism – the Martinists, Templars and Rosicrucians, and their myriad variants, schisms and spin-offs – but hot on their heels came new sects that cribbed notes from their holier-than-thou predecessors and created something dynamic and new, that would redefine occultism outside of Scripture's shadow.

Most notable of these was the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and, under Britain's infamous Aleister Crowley, the previously benign Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO). OTO had its origins as a German response to Freemasonry, but morphed into the vessel for Crowley's new faith, Thelema, in the first decade of the 20th century.

Another world unto itself was the Theosophical Society, founded in the US by a Russian emigré Spiritualist called Helena Blavatsky. From her beginnings as a fraudulent table-tapper, Madame Blavatsky had become increasingly enthused by Hindu and Buddhist thought and from the 1880s the Theosophical Society – which relocated its HQ to India – became focused on attaining higher states of consciousness by following the esoteric learning of the Masters of the Ancient Wisdom, who had been helpfully reincarnated into the club's upper echelons.

The abrasive German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche explained it best, writing in 1872's *The Birth of Tragedy*:

What does our great historic hunger signify, our clutching about us for countless other cultures, our consuming desire for knowledge if not the loss of myth, the mythic home, the mythic womb?

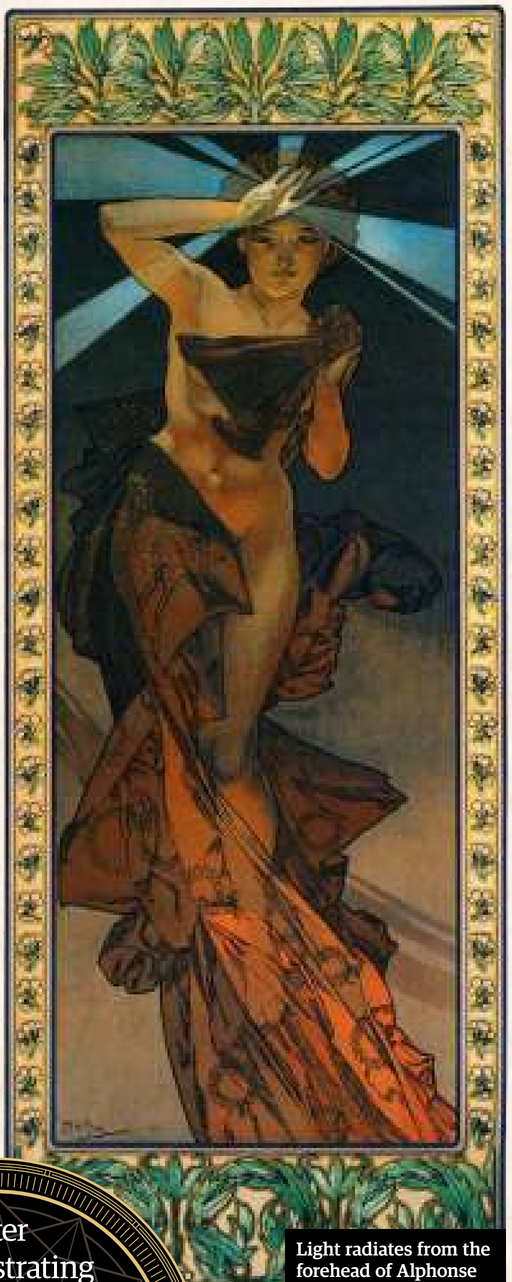
In the German-speaking world the search for a "mythic womb" was especially potent and the völkisch ('folkish') movement emerged in the early 19th century and morphed – thanks to the influence of Theosophy – into Armanism or Ariosophy in the 1890s. Austrian antiquarians Guido von List and Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels believed there was a spiritual link between the Germanic people and their land, and the ancient Germans were a nobler and purer bunch before the arrival of "foreign" influences like Christianity, industrialisation, and democracy, as well as "foreign" races like Slavs and Jews.

After demonstrating her powers in India, Helena Blavatsky was exposed as a fraud in 1885 by the Society for Psychical Research

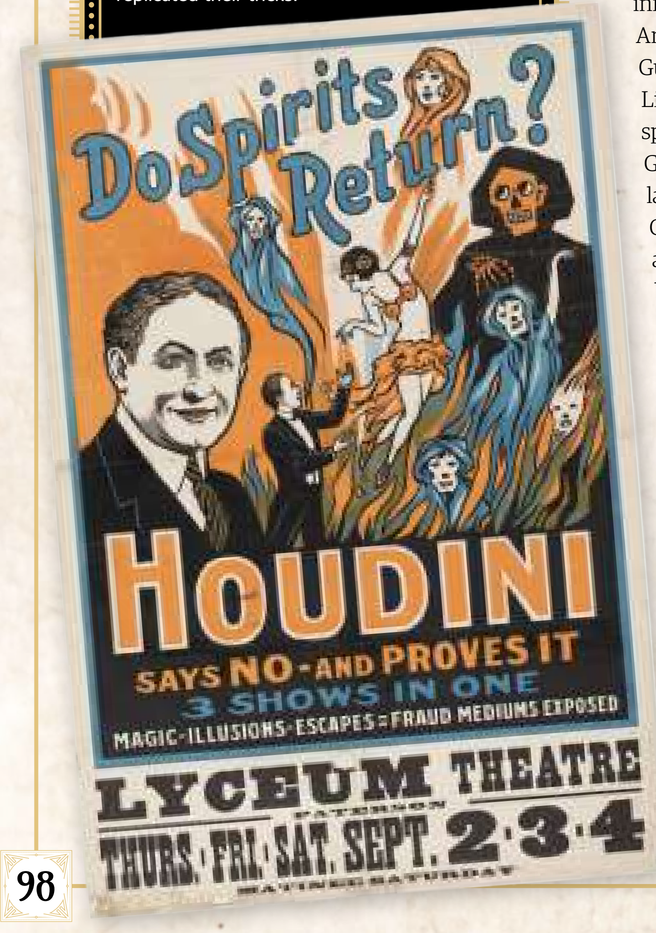
This unique combination of elements, albeit with an Irish-republican rather than virulently racist character, would emerge outside of Germany in the Celtic revival poetry of WB Yeats, a rare romantic nationalist in London's occult ecosystem of glorified gentlemen's supper clubs, as well as his fellow Irishmen, the artist and poet George William "AE" Russell, and the fantasy novelist Lord Dunsany.

"I often think I would put this belief in magic from me if I could," wrote Yeats in his 1903 pamphlet, *Ideas of Good and Evil*, "for I have come to see or to imagine, in men and women, in houses, in handicrafts, in nearly all sights and sounds, a certain evil, a certain ugliness, that comes from the slow perishing through the centuries of a quality of mind that made this belief and its evidences common over the world."

In contrast to this nationalist primitivism, French occultism was largely a metropolitan affair not much bothered by a retreat into wilderness or



Light radiates from the forehead of Alphonse Mucha's *Morning Star*



Harry Houdini pulls no punches in this 1909 poster for his medium-busting stage show

Spooks and charlatans

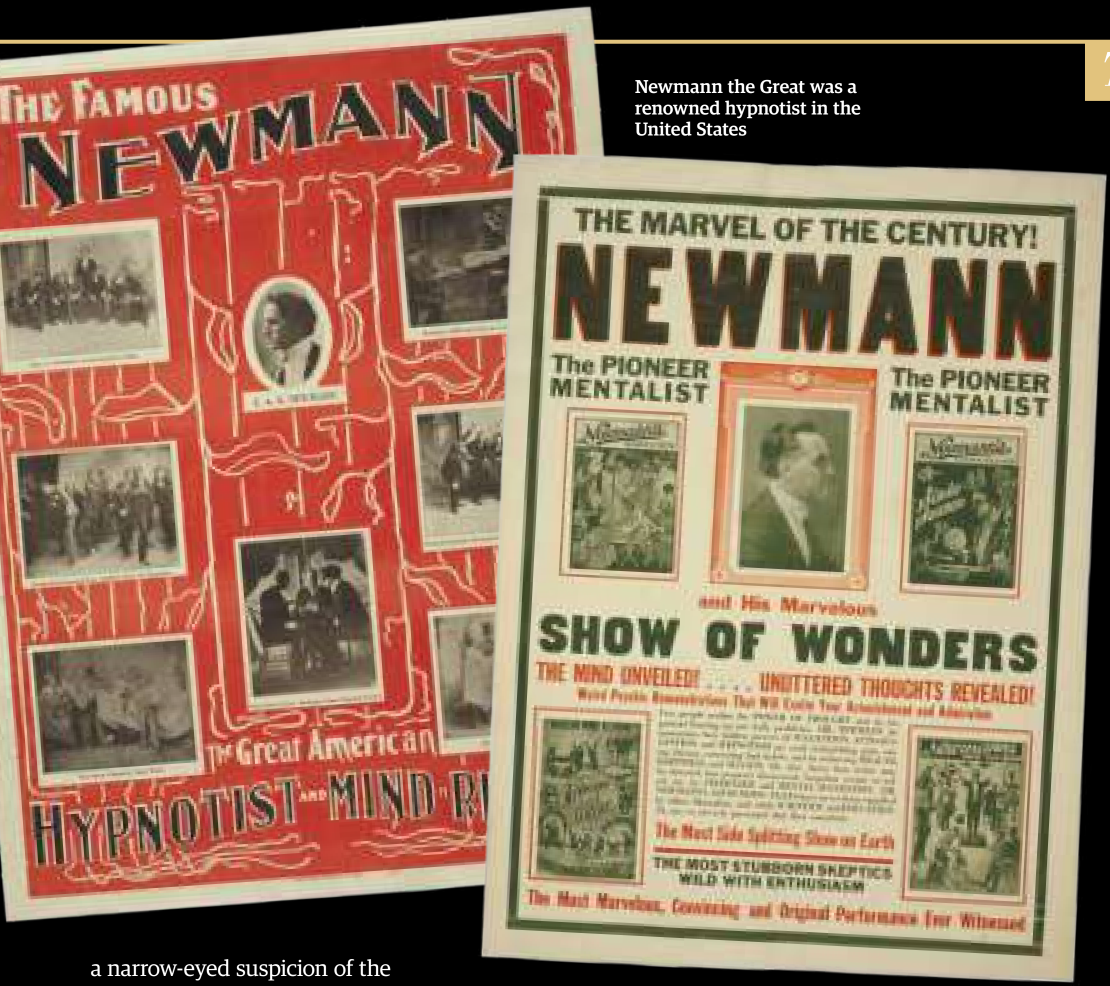
From the very beginnings of Spiritualism, some of its practitioners were being outed as frauds who took advantage of the bereaved.

The movement began in rural New York with Margaret and Kate Fox, two sisters who in 1848 convinced their older sister their home was haunted by rapping the floor with an apple on a piece of string. They soon took what was effectively their circus act on the road with the help of some trusting Quakers who formed the core of the new Spiritualist movement.

Though the Fox sisters were outed and confessed in 1888, their dubious craft continued through countless others who used hidden accomplices, fake arms, or string to move objects, and double exposure to create haunting 'spirit photographs' that exposed spectral visitors where none had been previously visible.

The fraudulent Spiritualists had their opponents though and faced condemnation from some religious authorities, were subject to vigorous testing by the Society of Physical Research, and were dogged by the illusionist Harry Houdini, who recognised a perversion of his own craft at work.

Though he was an old friend of Arthur Conan Doyle, Houdini and Doyle began to trade blows in the press as Houdini campaigned to expose Spiritualists by touring a stage show in which he replicated their tricks.


THE FAMOUS
NEWMANN
The Great American
HYPNOTIST AND MIND R
THE MARVEL OF THE CENTURY!
NEWMANN
The PIONEER MENTALIST
The PIONEER MENTALIST
and His Marvelous
SHOW OF WONDERS
THE MIND UNVEILED! . . . UNUTTERED THOUGHTS REVEALED!
The Most Side Splitting Show on Earth
THE MOST STUBBORN SKEPTICS WILD WITH ENTHUSIASM
The Most Marvelous, Convincing and Original Performance Ever Witnessed

Newmann the Great was a renowned hypnotist in the United States

a narrow-eyed suspicion of the modern world. It was defined broadly by prayer and absinthe, for those not quite ready to cut their strings to Mother Church and the decadent dandies-about-town.

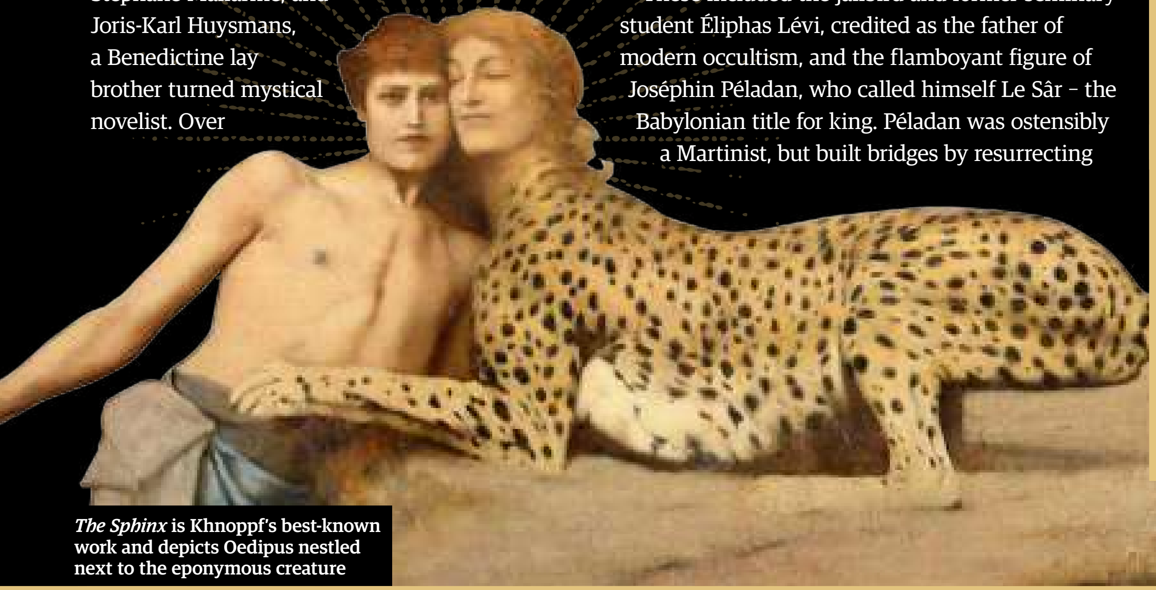
Symbolism was an art movement inspired by the writer Charles Baudelaire. He translated Edgar Allan Poe into French and sought to find through his work the au-delà – the world beyond our own – with the routes available to this lusty band being dreams, substance abuse, sex and the occult.

Among their number were artists Fernand Khnopff, Jan Toorop and Jean Delville, and writers André Gide, Stephane Mallarmé, and Joris-Karl Huysmans, a Benedictine lay brother turned mystical novelist. Over the fence in Art Nouveau, the Paris-resident Czech artist Alphonse Mucha dabbled in theosophy and occultism, and conjured mythic, folkloric figures in his stylised, dreamlike work.

Catholic apostasy provided France with its most dramatic characters, often rooted in Martinism (a belief that man could return to the spiritual state of grace he had enjoyed in the Garden of Eden), Gnosticism (belief that the physical world is debased but man can ascend in spirit) or the Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism based on the power of the Hebrew alphabet and numerals), or all three.

These included the jailbird and former seminary student Éliphas Lévi, credited as the father of modern occultism, and the flamboyant figure of Joséphin Péladan, who called himself Le Sâr – the Babylonian title for king. Péladan was ostensibly a Martinist, but built bridges by resurrecting

> Upset by the growing scepticism of the Society for Psychical Research, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle led a mass resignation



The Sphinx is Khnoppf's best-known work and depicts Oedipus nestled next to the eponymous creature

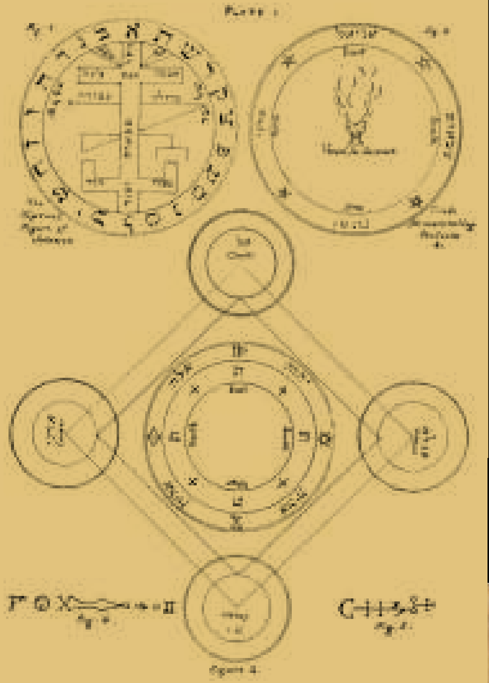
A New Dawn

No other organisation conjures up such feverish imaginings, was associated with so many larger than life characters (not all of whom were actually members), nor played such a vital role in transitioning the occult from the late 19th century and into the 20th as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

The origin story is a bit of a fog of self-mythologising courtesy of some of its more infamous members such as Aleister Crowley, but what we know for fact is that the Golden Dawn was founded in 1887 by Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, William Robert Woodman and William Wynn Westcott, based on a what they claimed was a recently deciphered Rosicrucian manuscript. The duo dutifully built their new society around the rituals contained within, which they insisted – dubiously – to be of ancient Egyptian origin.

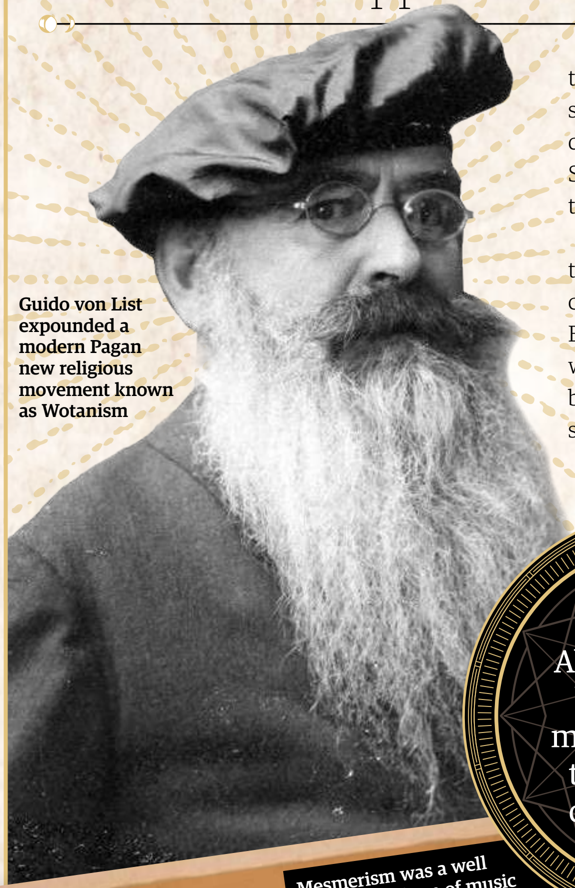
Lineage was incredibly important to late 19th century occultists, but their influences were more recent and that's what made the Golden Dawn such a potent distillation of the entire occult revival to date. It liberally helped itself to elements of theosophy, cosmology, Kabbalah rituals, astrology, alchemy, astral travel and the tarot, and Byzantine Rosicrucian rites and initiations.

Unlike earlier orders, the focus of the Golden Dawn was on practical magic and ritual, and so it found itself attracting the hungriest and most ambitious of occultists. These fiercely intelligent and competitive intellectuals thrived in the hierarchy of different ranks and levels, and – especially Crowley – had a marvellous time pulling the society apart in 1903.



Kabbalist sigils from Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers' translation of the Renaissance grimoire *The Key of Solomon*

"Magic didn't mean a retreat from Christianity, nor was it in opposition to scientific thinking"



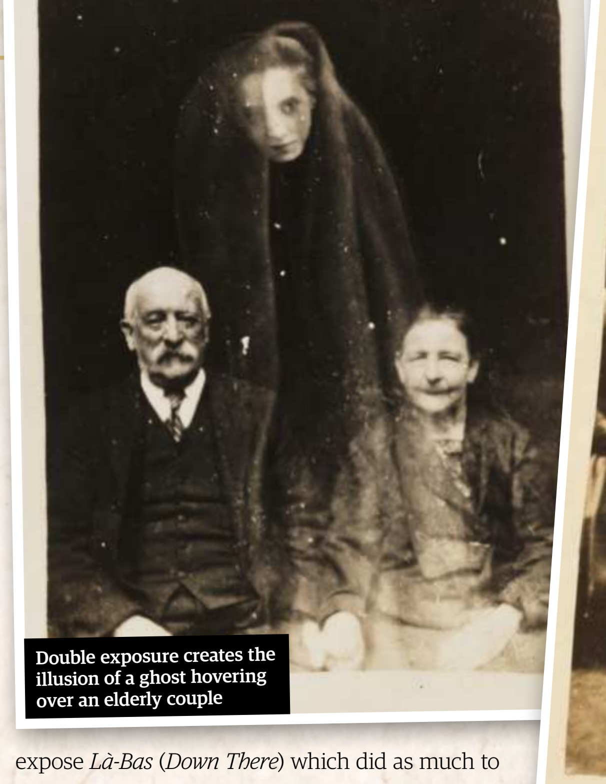
Guido von List expounded a modern Pagan new religious movement known as Wotanism

the Rosicrucian Brotherhood as a modern secret society alongside the prominent occultists Stanislas de Guaita and Gérard Encausse, and founded the Salon de la Rose+Croix for the Symbolists to exhibit their work and share their ideas.

A rather shrill and scandal-prone bunch, the leading lights of French occultism feuded constantly. Stanislas de Guaïta hated Joseph Boullan, a defrocked priest and alleged Satanist who was rumoured to have killed a child during a black mass and practised spiritual healing through sexual intercourse.

When Boullan passed away in 1893, Joris-Karl Huysmans accused Guaïta and Péladan of having killed him with black magic. Huysmans lashed out in a heavily fictionalised pulp expose *Là-Bas* (*Down There*) which did as much to inspire the look of Satanism than anything that real occultists ever did.

Queen Victoria and Abraham Lincoln both met with mediums in order to contact their deceased loved ones



Double exposure creates the illusion of a ghost hovering over an elderly couple

Just as magic didn't necessarily mean a retreat from Christianity, nor was it necessarily in opposition to scientific thinking. Instead the occult was another means to interpret a world that was only just beginning to be understood in any real kind of detail.

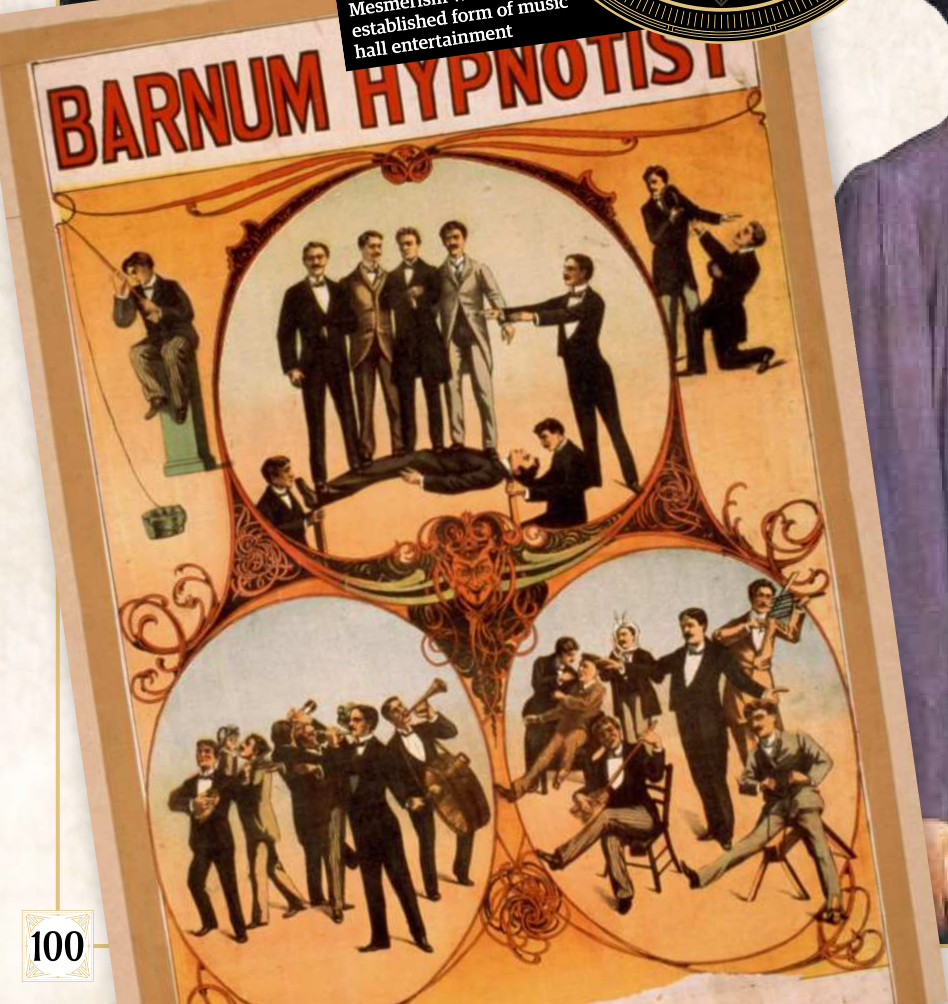
In a sense too, the growing confidence of the scientific worldview in tipping over the old certainties left what remained indecipherable up for grabs by concepts that seemed just as esoteric to the layman as bacteria or electrons.

Art movements love a good manifesto, and so the Belgian Symbolist Jean Delville spared few words in explaining his worldview in 1900's *New Mission in Art*:

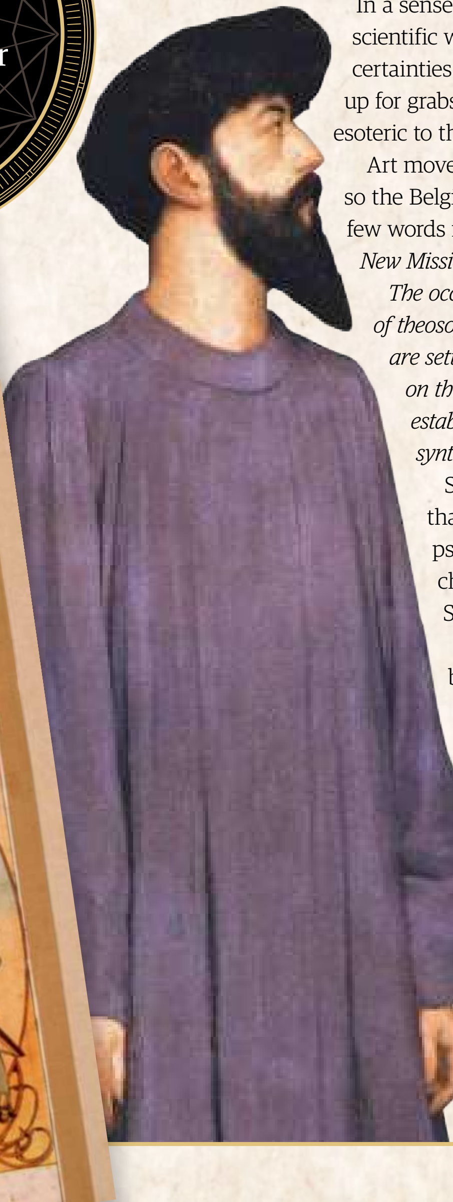
> *The occult sciences, the lofty teachings of theosophy, and experimental Spiritualism, are setting out to conquer the future, and, on the threshold of a new age, are about to establish the Science of the Ideal; that is the synthesis of science, religion,and philosophy.*

Some ideas clung so close to science that they still wear its cast-offs as pseudoscience or parapsychology, chief among them the doctrines of Spiritualism and mesmerism.

Mesmerism wasn't just hypnosis by another name. This art – the same one by which wandering holy man Grigori Rasputin claimed to be able to stem the internal bleeding of poor bloody Alexei, ill-fated heir to the Russian throne – was based on the premise that all living beings were governed by magnetic forces. The word "mesmerise" takes its name from its inventor, the 18th century German physician

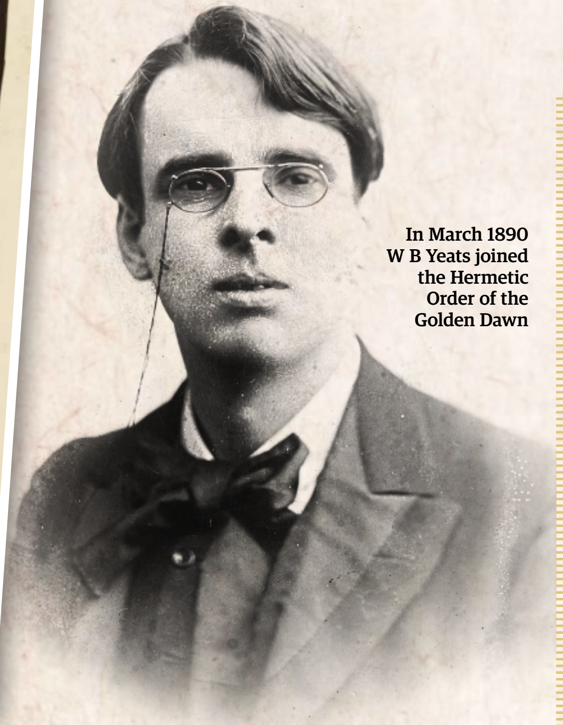


Mesmerism was a well established form of music hall entertainment



Péladan's *Le vice suprême* was interwoven with Rosicrucian and occult themes

A séance appears to have attracted a ghostly visitor



In March 1890 W B Yeats joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

Franz Anton Mesmer who also coined "animal magnetism", not to refer to physical attraction but the pull of celestial bodies on living creatures.

Through the use of magnetised wands and other props, the practitioner could claim to cure the vaguely defined health issues that have always been fair game for quacks. Though quickly discredited, it lived on in the imagination of occultists and had a second wind from 1841 when Scottish surgeon James Braid certified the veracity of a French mesmerist's act and became convinced that suggestion was more important than magnets – which was spot on, although not in the way he thought – and replaced it with hypnotism.

Thanks to Braid, mesmerism not only became an established part of medical orthodoxy as both a sedative and means of prompting the body to heal itself, but returned to music halls and dinner parties as a popular phenomenon.

Spiritualism was born in the United States in the 1850s, and soon spread to the Old World. It existed independently of much of the day's occult milieu, and despite a crossover in interest, it captured the public imagination in a way that ritual magic and esoteric secret societies failed to, dominating theatres with seances in which mediums purported to receive messages from dead loved ones. Lights dimmed, tables rattled and 'ectoplasm' was vomited forth by the unknown, unseen ghostly entities that had apparently been summoned.

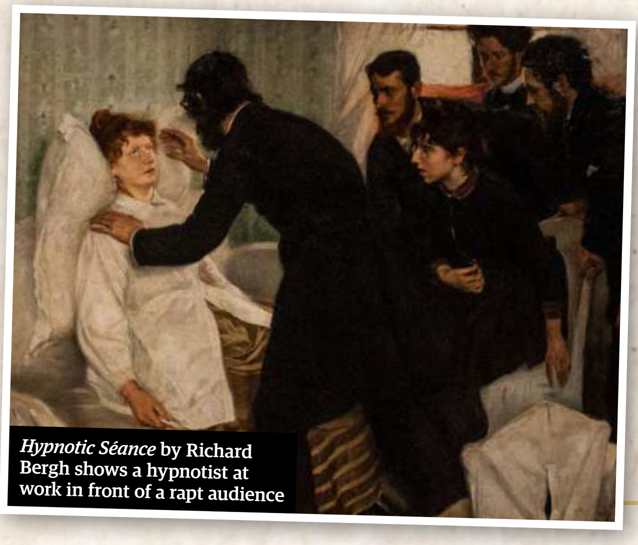
Curiously, while much of this history has been dominated by men, Spiritualism was incredibly popular with women and many of the practising mediums were female. Indeed, the only woman mentioned so far – Helena Blavatsky – started out as a Spiritualist.

> Charles Henry Allan Bennett was more interested in enlightenment, and established the first Buddhist mission in Britain

For many though, spiritualism conjures up one name, that of its most ardent evangelist: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Though his forthright position on the supernatural dealt a hammer blow to his credibility later in his career, in the context of the late 19th century at least, there was little remarkable, contradictory or – compared to some of the other characters we've encountered – controversial about his passions.

"There is nothing scientifically impossible," he wrote, in defence of the fraudulent photographs of the Cottingley Fairies, "so far as I can see, in some people seeing things that are invisible to others."



Hypnotic Séance by Richard Bergh shows a hypnotist at work in front of a rapt audience

The Gods Delusion

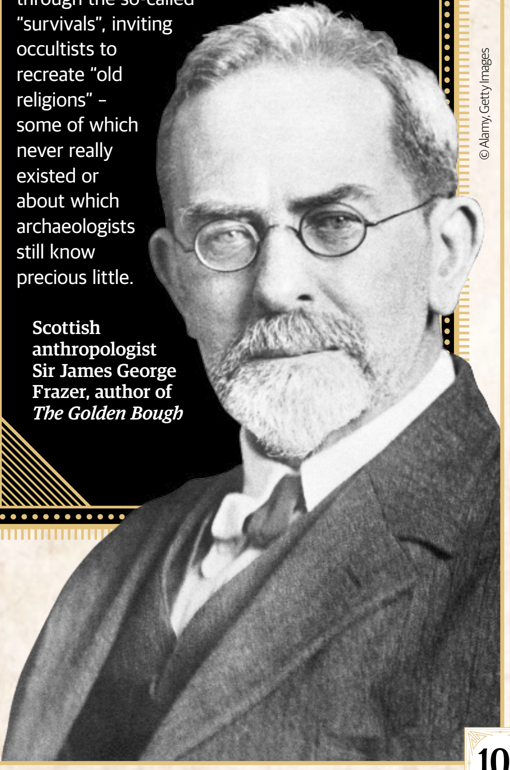
An ironic consequence of the scientific method was the idea that folklore and superstition represented a glimpse of pre-Christian religious practices, an essentially flawed premise that actually birthed new belief systems across the late 19th and early 20th century.

Anthropology emerged as a discipline in the mid-1800s and Europe's overseas empires offered an opportunity for inquiring minds to understand the nature of belief among what they once called the 'savages'.

Religion was organised and classified like insects under glass in an act of linear Eurocentric evolution in which fetishism (the imbuing of physical objects or locations with religious importance) gave way to polytheism (belief in multiple deities) which in turn gave way to monotheism (belief in a single deity), which was finally superseded by science.

The anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor coined the idea of "survivals" in 1871, proposing that folklore, ritual and superstition was in fact a remnant of earlier belief systems. Tylor's theory prompted a flurry of folklore collection and study, most infamously in 13 volumes of Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, which were published between 1892 and 1913. (It was re-subtitled *A Study in Magic and Religion* in its second and subsequent editions.)

Frazer's hastily drawn conclusions and cherry-picking research would prove profoundly influential in underscoring the alleged commonalities of pre-Christian mythology, and through the so-called "survivals", inviting occultists to recreate "old religions" – some of which never really existed or about which archaeologists still know precious little.

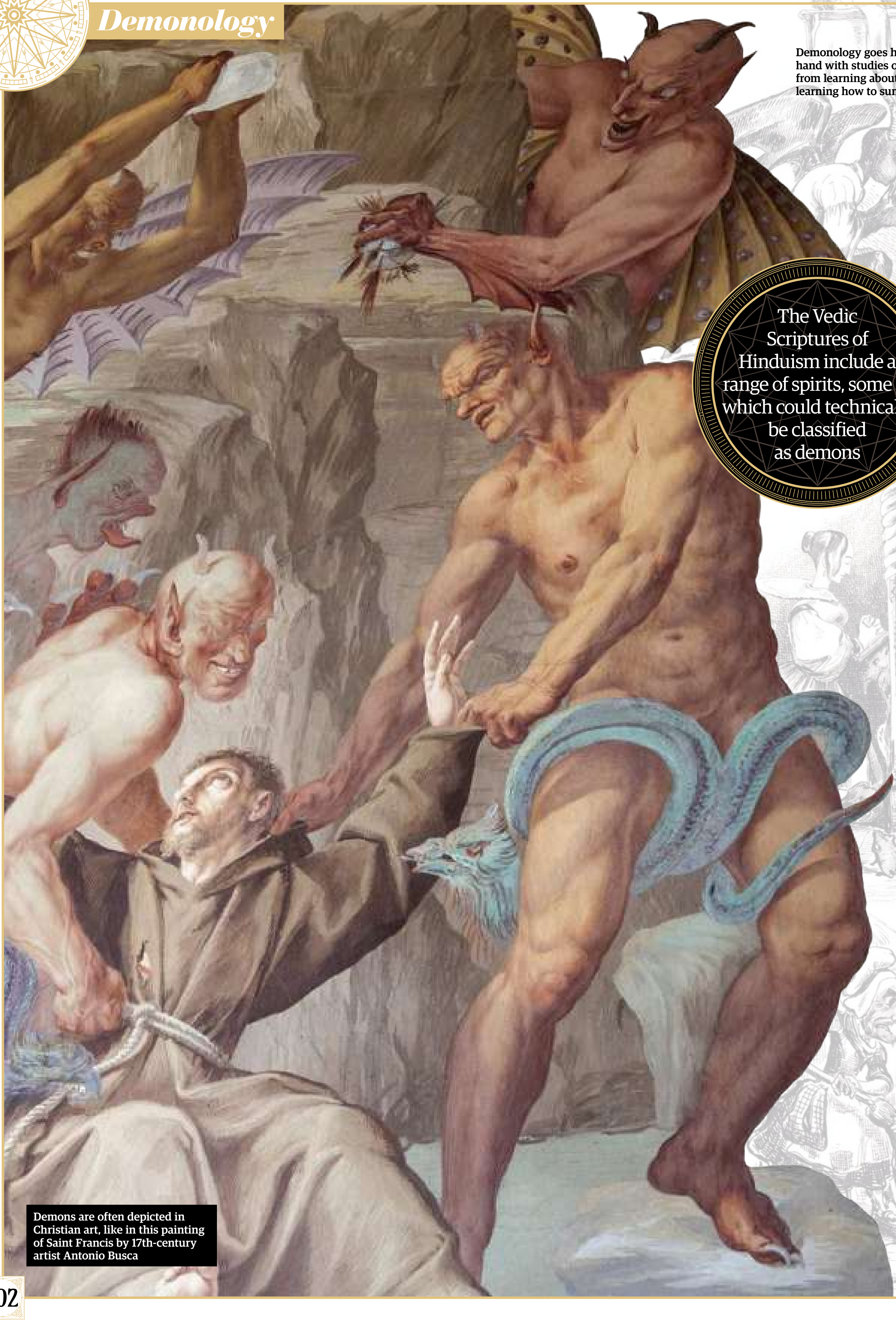


Scottish anthropologist Sir James George Frazer, author of *The Golden Bough*

© Alamy, Getty Images

Demonology goes hand-in-hand with studies of the occult, from learning about demons to learning how to summon them

The Vedic Scriptures of Hinduism include a range of spirits, some of which could technically be classified as demons



Demons are often depicted in Christian art, like in this painting of Saint Francis by 17th-century artist Antonio Busca

Demonology

Demons play a large part in religion, in both a literal and metaphorical sense. But Muslims, Hindus, Christians and more all have their own interpretations…

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

It may sound like a made-up Hogwarts class, but there's far more to demonology than meets the eye. It doesn't just cover the study of demons; it also involves the study of methods used to summon and control them.

With the term 'demon' being pretty common in both literature and common language, what actually constitutes a demon has become clouded over the years. Essentially, they are supernatural and often malevolent beings that enter into relations with the human race. However, not all depictions of demons are so negative. In ancient Greek mythology, for example, the word 'daimon' symbolises a spirit or divine power.

The most common idea of what demons specifically look like is usually the one concocted by Christianity, all cloven hooves, horns and pitchforks, but demons can be very different depending on which religions you're looking at. In the past, demons have generally been classified as spirits, but the similarities across different cultures end there.

> Babylonian mythology contained seven evil deities known as shedu, or 'storm-demons,' which took the shape of winged bulls

In Christian demonology, the study of demons from a purely Christian point of view, the spirits are thought of as corrupted angels that fell from grace. Some scholars have traced demons in the early Greek Old Testament back to two separate mythologies of evil: Adamic, which ties it with the fall of man caused by Adam and Eve; and Enochic, involving the fall of angels in the antediluvian period. Nowadays, not all Christians believe demons to be literal beings, and rather see the language of exorcism in the New Testament as metaphors for modern healing methods.

In Buddhism, it is believed that the hell realms of rebirth are manned by demons, with a demon named Mara in charge as chief tempter, that torment sinners, tempt mortals to sin, and attempt to prevent their enlightenment. It was widely thought that the imminent decline of Buddhism could be brought about by demonic influences when the religion first reached China in the 1st century CE. The idea of demons has also been extremely present in Indian Buddhism.

Unlike other religions, Islam doesn't have a doctrinal hierarchy of demonology. Some people see djinn as demons, but others don't. However, certain types of djinn have been classified within Islam, like Amir, a Djinni that lives among humans, Shaitan, a malicious and rebellious djinn, Marid, a stronger version of Shaitan that steals news from heaven, and Ifrit, the most powerful type of Shayateen.

St Michael subdues Satan, who is usually seen in Christianity and Islam as a fallen angel or djinn

Indian spectators gather around effigies of the Hindu demons Ravana, Meghnath and Kumbhkar before setting them alight

© Getty Images

Éliphas Lévi

A holy man with a chequered past and a prison record, Lévi defined occultism well into the first decade of the 20th century

Written by James Hoare

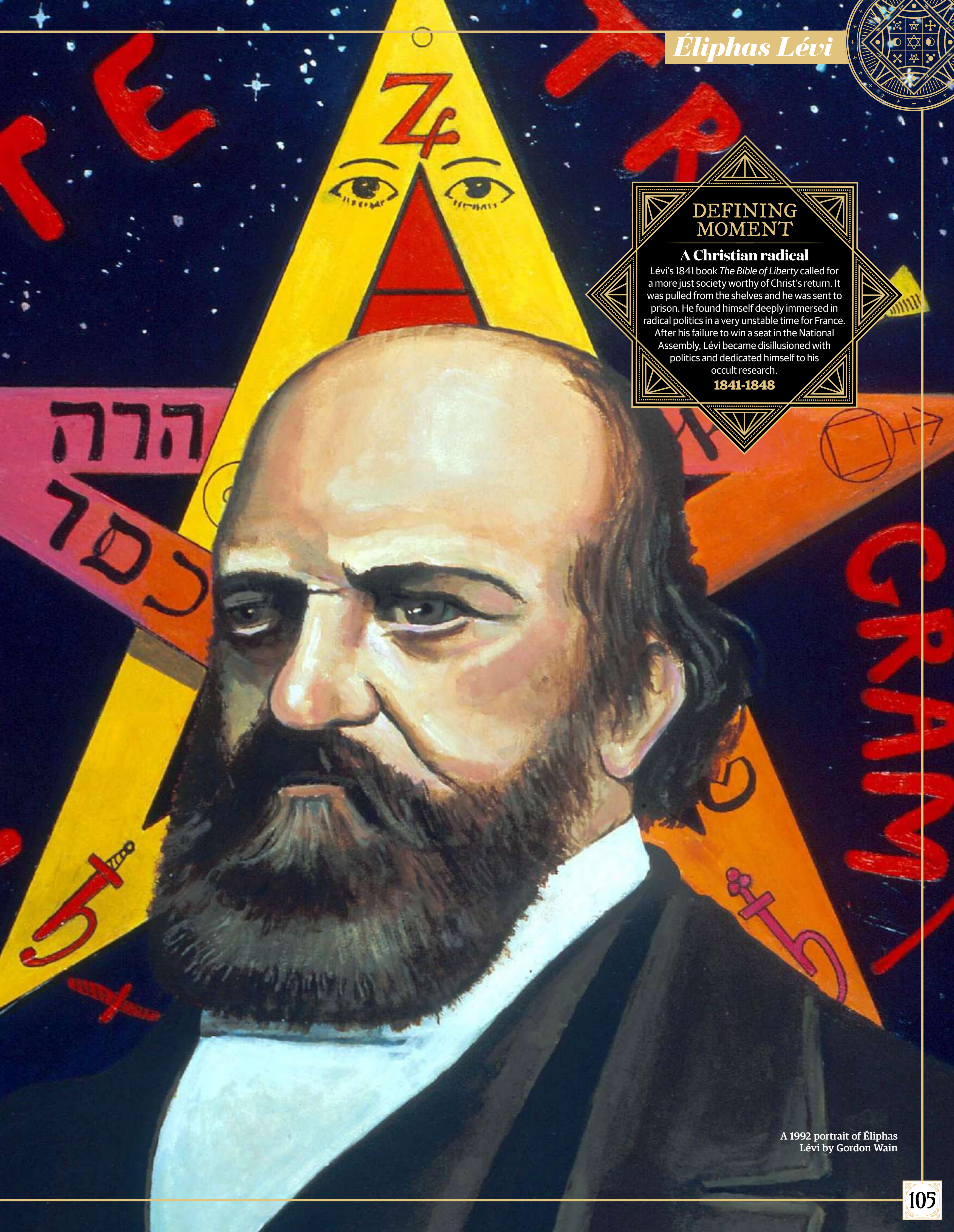
One of the most seemingly contradictory figures in the history of the occult, Éliphas Lévi - born Alphonse-Louis Constant in France in 1810 - was a devout Christian.

He was a former seminary student who used the title Abbé (Abbot) and wore the robes to match, yet this man of the cloth inspired Aleister Crowley so directly that the "Wickedest Man in the World" claimed to be inhabited by his reincarnated soul. He went to prison twice for his radical politics, and he was dogged by rumours of a relationship with a teenage girl that saw him tossed out of the church.

Lévi's approach to magic found its home in Britain with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the writer AE Waite, a man who more than any other popularised the tarot and its interpretation in the English-speaking world. These are all associations that inspire shrill accusations of Satanism and blasphemy that still endure in some quarters, yet Lévi was adamant that all he did was true to his faith.

A zealous Christian from an early age, Alphonse-Louis Constant's religious awakening at his first Holy Communion was so all-consuming that the parish priest dispatched him to the seminary of St Nicholas, where he would train for a life in the Roman Catholic church. At St Nicholas the young scholar fell under the influence of the Abbé Frere, who dabbled in the emerging occult sciences of mesmerism (the belief that an invisible magnetic force governed all living things and could be used to heal them) and Martinism (a form of Christian mysticism popular in 19th century France).

The Abbé was soon relieved of his duties and the atmosphere turned hostile to those students who had fallen under his influence. The deflated Constant left St Nicholas for the seminary of



DEFINING MOMENT

A Christian radical

Lévi's 1841 book *The Bible of Liberty* called for a more just society worthy of Christ's return. It was pulled from the shelves and he was sent to prison. He found himself deeply immersed in radical politics in a very unstable time for France. After his failure to win a seat in the National Assembly, Lévi became disillusioned with politics and dedicated himself to his occult research.

1841-1848

A 1992 portrait of Éliphas Lévi by Gordon Wain

The look of Black Magic

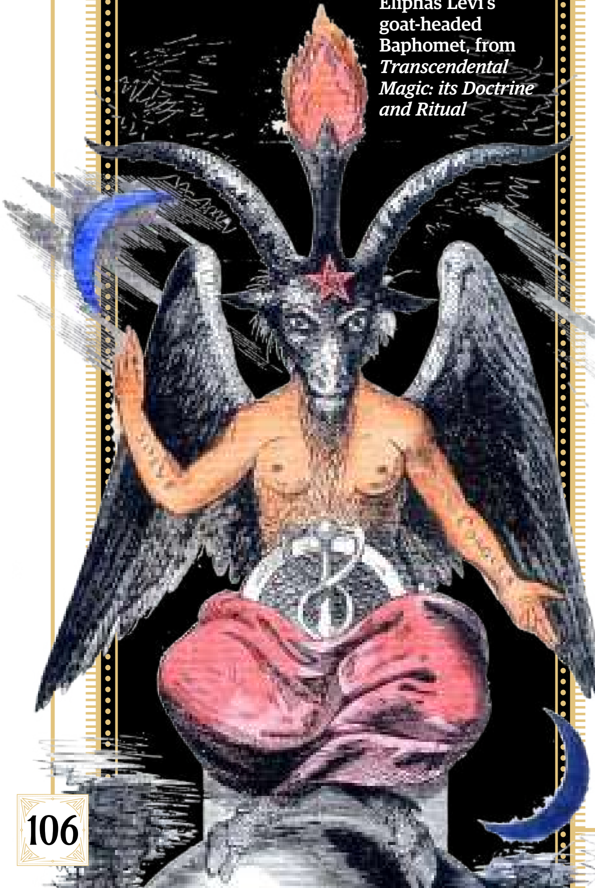
Although Lévi saw magic through a Christian lens, his work has done much to codify what it is we think of when we picture 'black magic'.

The idea of a point-up pentagram being 'good' and a point-down pentagram being 'bad' comes from Lévi and is now an established part of the iconography of occultism, Satanism and contemporary paganism.

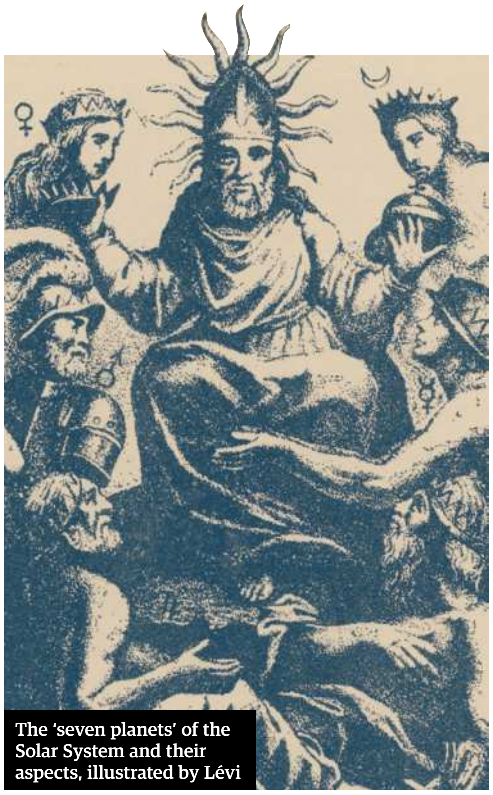
Another diabolic legacy is the depiction of Baphomet as a goat-headed figure (also referred to as the Goat of Mendes). The deity supposedly worshipped by the Knights Templar was described in various ways under torture – a severed head, a head with three faces, a skull, and a cat head – but it was Lévi who illustrated the 'devil goat' for the first time in *Dogma and Ritual of High Magic*.

Lévi's Baphomet imagery became incredibly important to Aleister Crowley in the development of Thelema and influenced the Devil card in AE Waite's popular Rider-Waite tarot deck, firmly bedding it into the popular imagination. Perhaps its most famous big screen appearance is in the climax of 1968 Hammer horror film *The Devil Rides Out*.

Éliphas Lévi was also a significant influence on the writer HP Lovecraft at the time he was developing his 'Cthulhu Mythos', and Lovecraft refers to him directly in his 1927 short story 'The Case of Charles Dexter Ward', lifting an evocation straight from Waite's translation of *Dogma and Ritual*...



Éliphas Lévi's goat-headed Baphomet, from *Transcendental Magic: its Doctrine and Ritual*



The 'seven planets' of the Solar System and their aspects, illustrated by Lévi

Constant's birthplace in Paris's sixth arrondissement. His father was a shoemaker

St Suplice where "they focused on the slow and painful learning of ignorance." But at least he was left to his own devices. It was here that he first became troubled by contradictions within the Bible – that a loving God could also wield eternal damnation as a flail.

Now a young man, it was at St Suplice where Constant had his controversial relationship with the 14-year old Adèle Allenbach. According to Constant she was a penniless waif that he was entrusted with preparing for communion, and slowly they grew "affectionate". His "innocent and open" relationship attracted no small amount of gossip, but he claims that rather than being defrocked, he was never actually ordained as a priest and instead departed "as a matter of conscience."

Constant took teaching jobs by day and spent his nights working on his masterpiece, *The Bible of Liberty*, which he felt addressed both his doctrinal anxieties and his growing frustration at social injustice. He was offered a bribe by the church to junk his manuscript, but refused, remaking wryly that it was the first time the church had deemed him worthy of financial support.

The Bible of Liberty was published on 13 February 1841 and remained on sale for about an hour before copies were seized by the police and Constant was sentenced to eight months for "impiety" and "advocating insurrection". His trial made him into something of a celebrity among the radicals of Paris.

Released in April 1842 (he served 11 months in the end), Constant tried to keep himself to himself, he penned a few articles for radical newspapers but it was distinct sideline to his study. He was given a second chance with the church and moved out of Paris to take up employment under his mother's maiden name – but the press caught up with him, declaring at first he had died and then announcing his "resurrection" and exposing his whereabouts.

In the ensuing scandal, Constant returned to Paris and continued to publish his religious and political writings, some of which he claimed were inspired by visions. On 3 February 1847 Constant was hauled before the judge again for his polemic *The Voice of Famine* and was charged with "disturbing public order by provoking and inciting hatred between the several classes of society".

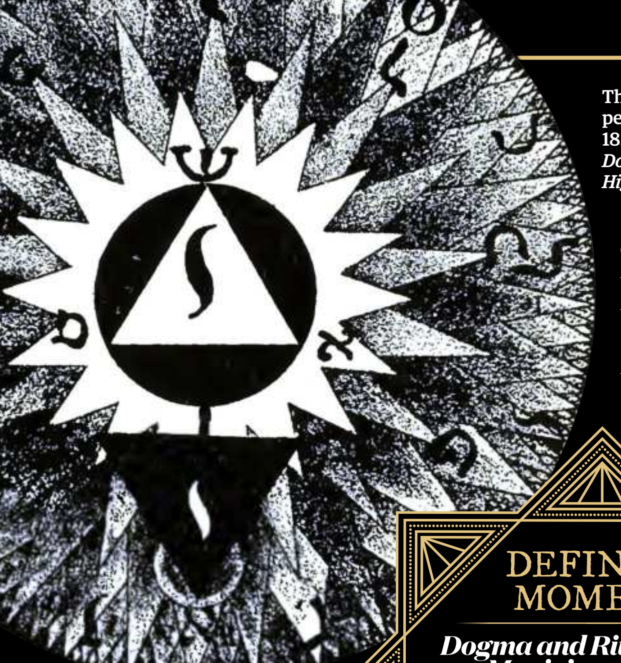
In the end he only served six months, thanks to an appeal from his pregnant young wife, the sculptor Marie-Noémi Cadiot. Over the rest of the decade following the February Revolution of 1848 –

DEFINING MOMENT

The father of the Occult Revival

Until his death in 1875, Lévi made his living through his writing and teaching. In 1854, Lévi visited London for the first time and the audience asked him to invoke the spirit of the ancient Greek magician Apollonius of Tyana – Spiritualism being the dominant occult art in Britain at the time. He was taken aback, but gave it a go.

1850s-1875



The kabbalistic Tarot pentacle from Lévi's 1855 masterpiece, *Dogma and Ritual in High Magic*

DEFINING MOMENT

Dogma and Ritual in High Magic is published

Lévi's two-part treatise on ritual magic is regarded as a foundation stone in the 19th century occult revival, but unlike many of his contemporaries and followers it was based on fairly rigid scholarship. Lévi dedicated his life to untangling the mysteries of the universe and reconciling them with his staunch Catholicism.

1854-1856

where he stood for the French National Assembly and failed to win a seat – he became increasingly disillusioned with politics and began to dedicate himself fully to spiritual matters.

Specifically he became enthused with kabbalah, a form of ancient Jewish mysticism (historians now believe it dates from the 12th century) based around the idea that the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the numbers one to ten each hold specific power.

In 1853 – the year his wife left him – Constant began publishing under the pseudonym Éliphas Lévi Zaed (although the Zaed part was rarely used), which he asserted was the Hebrew translation of his birth name. In 1854 and 1855 the two volumes of his text *Dogma and Ritual of High Magic* were published.

Abbé Constant, the Christian revolutionary was gone, and in his place stood Éliphas Lévi, the father of modern occultism. *Dogma and Ritual…* explained that science, and religion were one and the same, and magic was the means by which these two forces could be manipulated.

The most powerful kabbalistic combination was the Tetragrammaton – JHVH – the four Hebrew characters that make up the name of God or Jehovah. Lévi linked these to the four suits of the tarot deck (wands, cups, swords and coins/pentangles) through a Renaissance tradition that linked them to the four elements (fire, water, air and earth), establishing the tarot as the overarching framework for his particular interpretation of the magical art.

To put it simply: if kabbalah was the secret language of the universe, than the tarot was the dictionary defining it.

Like the kabbalah, the tarot deck had 22 major arcana (the 'hero' cards such as The Fool, Death and The Hanged Man) and the suits of the minor arcana (such as the Three of Swords or Eight of Wands) were numbered one through ten.

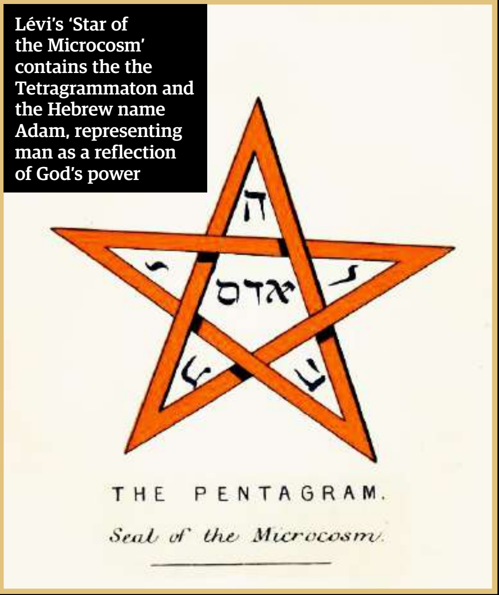
1860's *The History of Magic* and 1861's *The Key to the Great Mysteries* developed those themes (which he repeated ad infinitum in later texts, rattled out at a plenteous rate). In them Lévi reconciled accounts of sorcery, alchemy, and Biblical miracle into a single belief system that saw Jesus Christ stand alongside Renaissance alchemist and astrologer Paracelsus as magi, men who reshaped the world through magic.

Lévi's work didn't catch on in France with anywhere near the fervour with which it was adopted in the English-speaking world. There it became part of the rich stew of cherry-picked superstition and pagan leftovers that informed the ritual magic of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the belief in ancient mystical masters espoused by the Russian-born émigré Madame Blavatsky and her Theosophical Society.

Lévi didn't live to see the extent of his occult legacy. He died in 1875, three years before Blavatsky published *Isis Unveiled*, her first major work, and 12 years before three disillusioned Freemasons in smoking jackets gathered together to explore the mysteries of the universe, passing their wisdom on to such luminaries as Aleister Crowley, Dion Fortune, AE Waite and WB Yeats. Perhaps it was for the best. As a dedicated Christian who believed he had cracked the code at the heart of his – and indeed all – faith, he may well have been appalled by the rise of self-absorbed hedonists and humanists like Crowley, who brushed Lévi's deeply held Christian convictions to one side as a mere prop in order to rummage through his rituals.

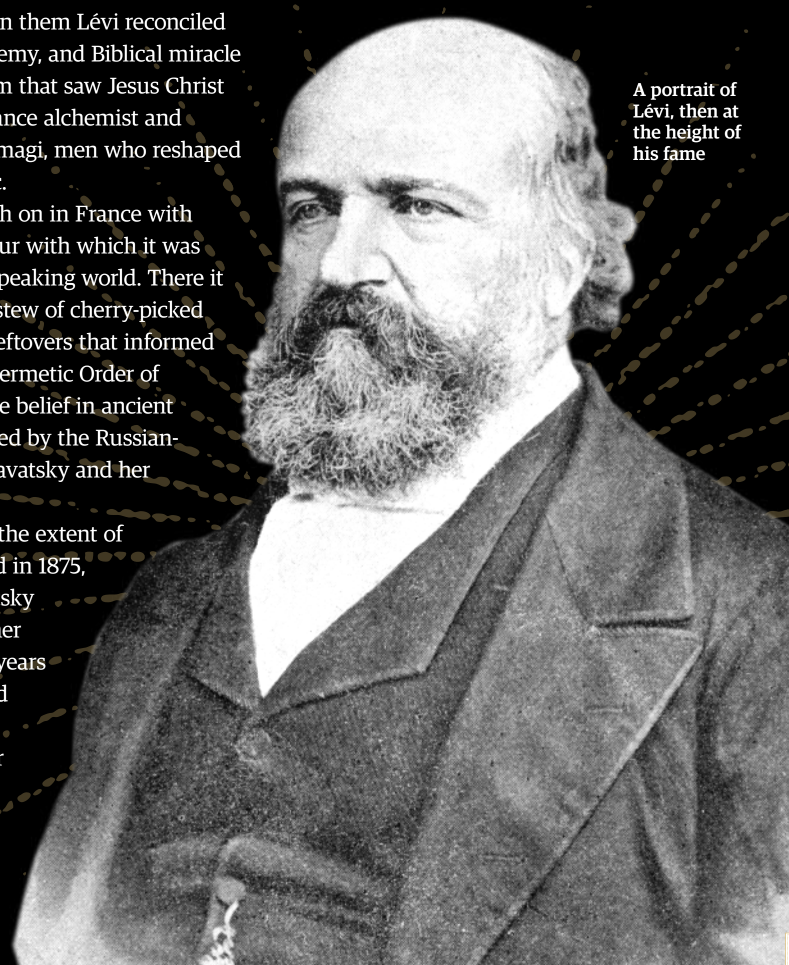
Or perhaps Éliphas Lévi, that most unlikely father of occultism and most unorthodox of true believers, would simply have turned the other cheek.

> "Father, forgive them,' said Jesus, 'for they know not what they do.' People of good sense whoever you may be, I will add, do not listen to them, for they know not what they say."
>
> ***The Great Secret or Occultism Unveiled* (1868)**



Lévi's 'Star of the Microcosm' contains the the Tetragrammaton and the Hebrew name Adam, representing man as a reflection of God's power

THE PENTAGRAM.
Seal of the Microcosm.



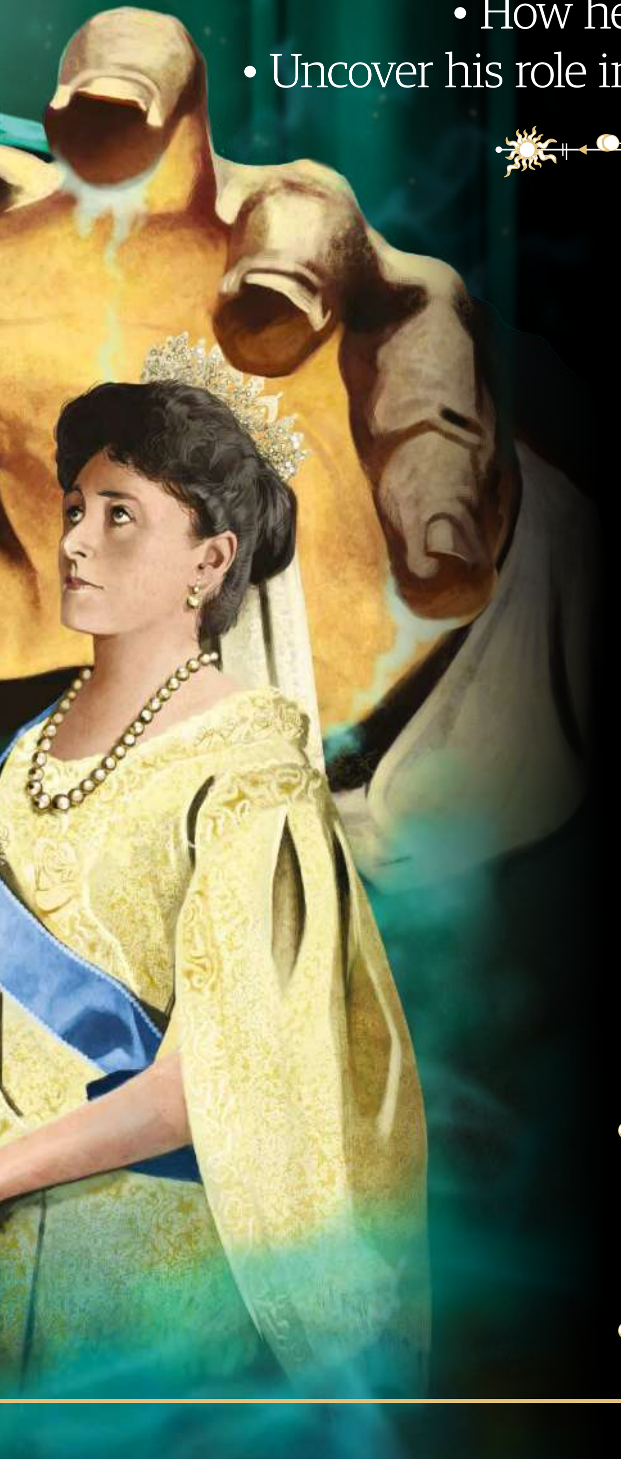
A portrait of Lévi, then at the height of his fame

© Alamy, Getty Images

Inside the twisted mind of Russia's 'Mad Monk' Rasputin

- How he gained the trust of Russian royalty
- Uncover his role in the fall of a dynasty
- The gruesome murder

Written by Frances White



For a great deal of time in Russia it was believed that the name Rasputin meant 'licentious', and it was this image of the man that became the most prevalent. Rasputin was an accused sexual deviant, a rapist, and 'Mad Monk' who played the Russian royals like keys on a piano and whispered dark urges into the tsarina's ear. Rasputin, however, does not mean licentious at all. Its meaning is closer to, 'Where two rivers meet', referring to the place where he was born.

Just like his name, the true Rasputin, the man who lived and breathed, has been lost to history and replaced with caricatures; an old man with a long scraggly beard, terrible teeth and even more terrible deeds - but also a doting father, a respected holy man and a lover of beauty. It is this duality that has confounded and caused debates to this day. Was he indeed the man who brought a Russian dynasty to its knees, or has history created a scapegoat out of a man who only ever acted with good intentions?

The village of Pokrovskoye was small even by Siberian standards. It was more like a remote scattering of houses in the wide expanse of the West Siberian plains. With only 200 dwellings and no more than a thousand residents, it was an incredibly isolated start for the man whom every citizen of Russia would come to know, fear and loathe. But it was in this quiet and sleepy peasant village that Grigori Rasputin was born. The fifth of nine children, from a very early age Rasputin did not fit in with his peers. He did not attend school, for there was no school for him to attend, and he soon fell into a life of debauchery and drunkenness. The peasants of the close-knit village did not trust the strange boy, and he was an outsider even in his place of birth. He found the backbreaking labour of peasant work boring and empty, and he stole horses, fences - anything to add colour to his dull existence.

Rasputin was not a fool; he did not live a life of crime due to incompetence, but instead because of a feeling that his life was lacking something. He had a wife, he even had children, but he still felt a gaping emptiness. Now in his twenties, he found himself, either through divine providence or banishment, at the newly expanded Verkhoturye Monastery. It was there that he met Starets Makary, an elder who lived a humble existence in the woods near the monastery. Rasputin's interactions with this holy man slowly transformed the rebellious youth into a deeply spiritual individual. Rasputin gave up alcohol, tobacco and meat. When he returned to

> "The true Rasputin, the man who lived and breathed, has been lost to history and replaced with caricatures"

Faith or fake?

Alexandra believed Rasputin cured her son with faith-healing, but it's one of many explanations

The wrong drugs

Aspirin was in use at the time and it is likely it was administered to the heir to help reduce his pain. Rasputin may have rejected the use of this drug, and by doing so unintentionally helped the boy, as aspirin thins the blood and would have worsened Alexei's condition.

Calming presence

As a holy man it is not out of the question to assume that Rasputin brought a calm, tranquil air to both Alexandra and her son. This reduced stress may have helped the bleeding to gradually slow and stop.

Drugging

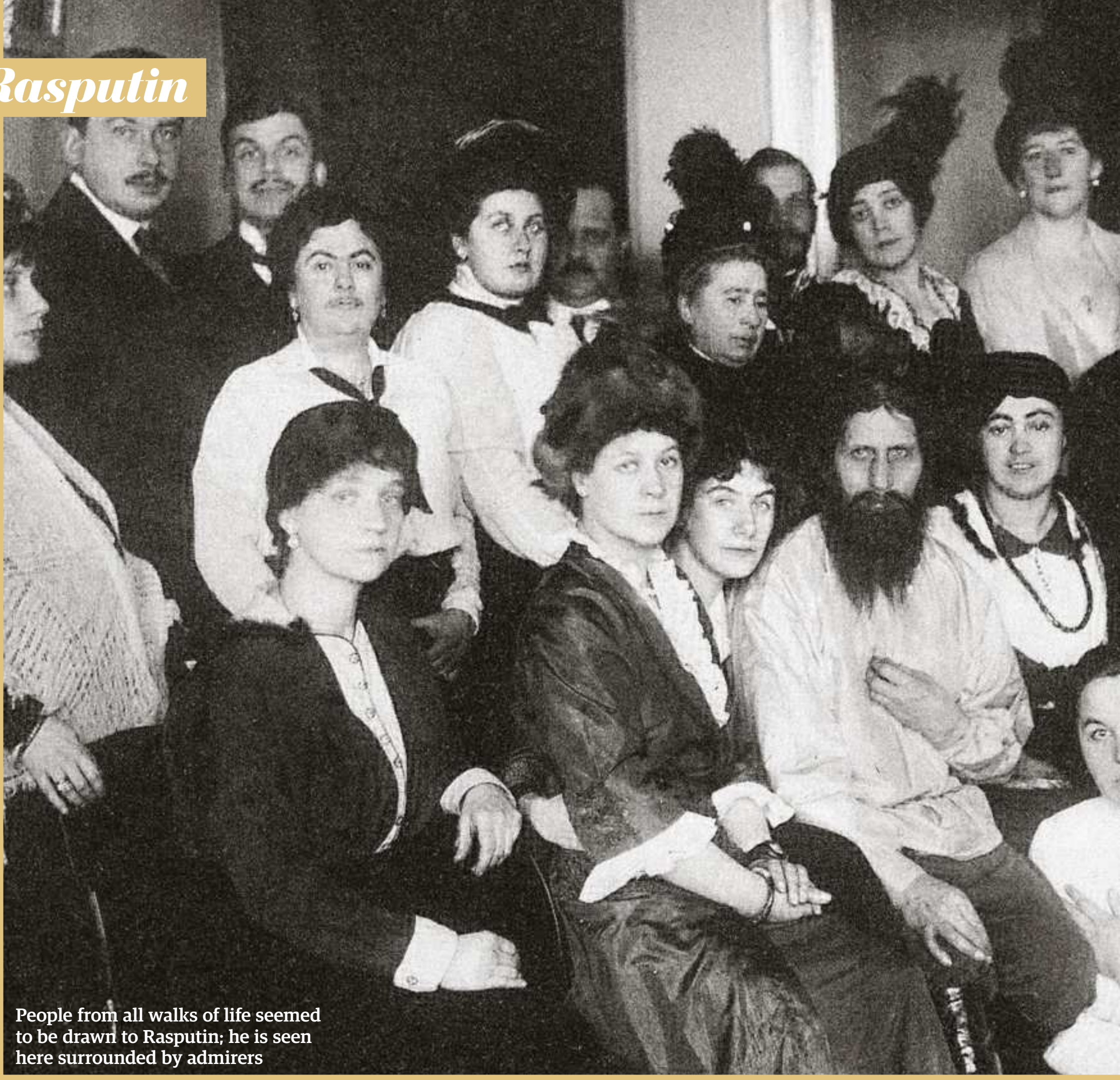
A popular theory at the time was that Rasputin was drugging Alexei with Tibetan herbs. This theory was fuelled by the disconnect people felt towards the imperial family.

Good timing

Others believed Rasputin to be less occult and more cunning. It was argued that he had a confidant at the court, a lady-in-waiting, who fed him information about Alexei, and when the boy was on the mend the healer made an appearance to claim the credit.

Hypnosis

The court physician at the time, Botkin, fiercely disliked Rasputin and claimed he had used hypnosis on the child, whispering words into his ear and inducing the bleeding to stop.



People from all walks of life seemed to be drawn to Rasputin; he is seen here surrounded by admirers

Pokrovskoye the criminal had become a fervent religious convert.

Rasputin had been inspired by Makary but not by the monastery. Not only did he accuse the place of practising a "vice" which was likely homosexuality, but he also later proclaimed that the monastic life was not for him, saying, "One finds violence over people there." He believed that only by venturing across the world could he truly become closer to God and salvation. Throughout his whole life, Rasputin had never been one to sit idly, and he was definitely not accustomed to bowing to authority and blindly following orders, so it is not surprising he was repulsed by a life of servitude in a cold stone building. Rasputin, after all, did not belong in small places, or behind locked doors. His ever-wandering heart wished to explore the vastness of the Earth, and that's exactly what he set about doing.

Rasputin packed few belongings, wished his family goodbye and began the life of a strannik, or mystic wanderer. We do not know the extent or length of Rasputin's various pilgrimages in this stage of his life, but it is possible that he travelled as far as Mount Athos, the centre of the Orthodox Church. Sometimes he did not come back home for years, and his own wife and children struggled to recognise the man that returned. However, even in this life of a strannik Rasputin began to carve his own path. He disliked abiding by the accepted norms, preferring to do things his own way. For example, he would refuse to wear the traditional fetters and instead wore the same shirt for an entire year. He was rebellious and headstrong, but he was also thoughtful, independent and astonishingly open-minded for a peasant from a tiny village.

During these years of wandering Rasputin encountered many different kinds of people from all branches of the Russian social order. He developed strong opinions but also discovered and refined his ability to read people. Many have commented in memoirs and elsewhere that what Rasputin possessed was a very unique magnetism. He had a talent for understanding people quickly, he knew exactly what to say to them and he was unlike any priest or holy man they had encountered. This is because it was the truth - Rasputin was different, he had not confined himself to books and monasteries, but to the real world, and real people. When he spoke about God it was with a meaning that normal people could understand and his own beliefs were strengthened not simply with study, but with vivid, electric and very real experiences.

This 'magnetism' began to draw people to Rasputin's home. Villagers and pilgrims further afield travelled to sit, talk, pray and seek council from the man. He soon amassed a loyal group of followers who would meet regularly to read from the Bible and sing religious songs in a secret chapel - a cave beneath the stables created by

Rasputin himself. However, as these meetings grew in popularity, Rasputin also attracted negative attention. Rumours quickly spread that he was often seen with young women, that his followers would bathe him, and that he was teaching them mysterious rituals.

Rasputin was especially despised by the resident priest of Pokrovskoye, who likely didn't relish the idea of an upstart peasant gaining such popularity over himself and his own teachings. Due to all this attention, Rasputin's meetings were abandoned and the priest probably thought that was the end of it, but little did he know Rasputin had only just begun to scratch the surface of the power and influence he held.

When Rasputin announced his intentions to travel to St Petersburg, he was warned by a fellow holy man that "the city will ruin you", but he ignored the warning; he had set his heart on a single mission, and nobody could dissuade him. Although Rasputin was a worldly man he was completely unprepared for the city and it could have easily swallowed him. Fortunately his work had not gone unnoticed and he bore a letter of recommendation that granted him access to Bishop Sergei, the rector of the St Petersburg Seminary. Through association with Sergei, Rasputin became known to the curious elite of St Petersburg and the counts and countesses were fascinated by the bedraggled travelling man with his soft, strong words and strange allure. Many of the aristocracy, painfully bored with their structured, weary lives, found his peculiar ways amusing, like wearing his hair long and the way he kissed women when first meeting them. The outsider was a curiosity, a talking point and almost a party piece.

> "The outsider was a curiosity… and almost a party piece"

Soon the aristocracy were introducing him to their friends and the name Rasputin became known to anyone who was anyone in the capital. After befriending Princess Milica of Montenegro and her sister Anastasia, Rasputin was then introduced by them to the two most powerful figures in the whole of Russia - the tsar and the tsarina, Nicholas II and Alexandra. Rasputin had

The power of the mystic

Historian Douglas Smith discusses the growing interest in the occult, and how this aided Rasputin's rise to power

Douglas Smith is an award-winning historian and translator. He is the author of five books on Russia, including, most recently, *Rasputin*. He lives in Seattle with his family. To learn more, visit **www.douglassmith.info**

Just how widespread was the Russian upper-class fascination with mysticism?

The turn of the century was a period of intense spiritual searching in Russia. During what became known as Russia's Silver Age, from roughly 1890 to 1914, the country's educated classes exhibited a fascination for mysticism and the occult and all manner of the supernatural, from table turning, hypnotism, and chiromancy, to Rosicrucianism, fortune-telling, telepathy, and Theosophy. Hypnotism was more popular in early 20th century Russia than in Western Europe and was a particularly common practice among St Petersburg psychiatrists. The best-known psychiatrist-hypnotist at the time was Vladimir Bekhterev, who used hypnosis widely as part of his science of 'psychoneurology.' The fascination for the occult became widespread, extending well beyond Russia's artists and intellectuals and reaching deeply into the middle classes.

How and why did this obsession with the occult grow among Russian aristocrats?

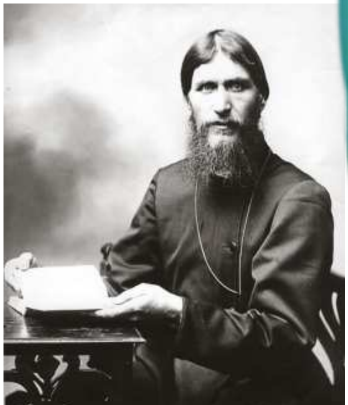
Most educated Russians began turning away from the materialist positivism of the 19th century and back to the church and other forms of spiritualism in what can be called a true religious renaissance. Many sought to revitalise what was widely perceived as a hidebound, bureaucratic, and spiritually dead official Russian Orthodox Church, to infuse it with a renewed sense of mystery, fervency, and life. Others rejected the church altogether for new forms of spiritual experience that held the promise of even more powerful encounters with the sacred.

Did this religious renaissance help Rasputin gain influence over the imperial family?

This religious renaissance is crucial to understanding the rise of Rasputin. On one hand, his biography reflects this moment in Russian history. He himself had some sort of profound religious experience in his late twenties and he left home in Siberia to become what the Russians call a strannik, a holy pilgrim. For years he wandered in rags and often in fetters across the empire to various holy places and holy men in search of spiritual enlightenment. This was his university, so to speak, and in time he became known for his profound knowledge of scripture and insights into Christian teachings and human nature. He was embraced in St Petersburg by lofty bishops and members of the Romanov family as a charismatic peasant holy man in whom burned the true unvarnished Orthodox faith. It was they who introduced Rasputin to Nicholas and Alexandra, thus opening his path to the throne.

Was Rasputin as much a mystic as the public perceived him to be or were his aims more political?

From the beginning of his relationship with Nicholas and Alexandra, Rasputin offered not only religious teachings, but political counsel as well. They first met during the Revolution of 1905, and Rasputin instructed the tsar to remain firm and not give in to the demands for political change. In the summer of 1914, Rasputin wrote a remarkable letter to Nicholas, begging him to ignore the voices of the warmongers and resist the temptation to go to war. In apocalyptic terms, Rasputin wrote he foresaw "ruin" and "grief without end." Nicholas, of course, did not heed this prophetic advice. In late 1916, not long before his murder, Rasputin pleaded with Nicholas to do something about the growing bread lines in the capital. He told the tsar the people were hungry and growing angry. Nothing, however, was done, and soon these same people would spark a revolt that would bring down the 300-year-old dynasty of the Romanovs.



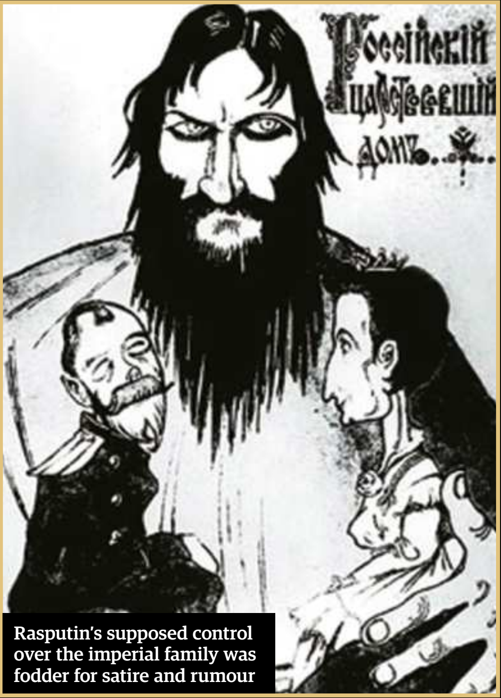
In addition to religious counsel, Rasputin advised on political topics used his powerful words and enchanting nature to climb from the bottom rungs of Russian society to the very top.

Rasputin's arrival to the lives of the Imperial family could not have been better timed if he had planned it himself. Russia was in a state of disarray; they had lost a war against Japan in devastating fashion, humiliating the country on the world stage. The tsar also had to deal with the fallout after Bloody Sunday – where hundreds, if not thousands, of peaceful protestors were massacred by the Imperial Guard. Although Nicholas himself had not given the order to fire, for many it condemned the tsar, who they had, until the massacre, regarded as a 'father'. The Imperial family were facing a brutal backlash and there was a very real chance of them losing their grip on the country entirely. Rasputin sat and listened to Alexandra's worries and they spoke at length about religion. The holy man calmly told her that her husband needed to be closer to his people, and that she could trust his words. Alexandra immediately became close to Rasputin, as she too had a strong belief in the strength of the dynasty, and believed that he had been sent by God to secure the strength of their royal line.

> "Alexei became a symbol of the future of Russian royalty"

Alexandra's trust in Rasputin meant that when her son, Alexei, suffered from one of his haemophilic bleeding episodes, she summoned him immediately. The boy was the Imperial family's only male heir, and his mother adored and doted on him. Alexandra was well aware of the seriousness of his condition; she had lost an uncle and brother to the same hereditary disease, passed down from her grandmother, Queen Victoria, and it is likely she knew that it would claim her son, too. Alexei became a symbol of the future of Russian royalty – to save him was also to save tsardom. Alexandra had spoken to many doctors and tried multiple cures for her son's disease but nothing had worked, and so in her moment of need, with her child dangerously close to death, she called upon the mystic holy man.

Rasputin came to the palace, began to pray by the boy's bed and amazingly, seemed to be able to calm the child, his condition rapidly improving. In another incident Alexei sustained an injury and lay suffering and moaning for days. Alexandra, remembering how Rasputin had managed to ease her child previously, sent a telegram to the man. Rasputin quickly responded to her worries; "The little one will not die. Do not allow the doctors to bother him too much." Just as he said, the boy's



Rasputin's supposed control over the imperial family was fodder for satire and rumour

The men who killed Rasputin

Pushed to the edge by desperation, these men formed a conspiracy to put an end to Rasputin once and for all

Felix Yusupov

Coming from an extremely wealthy family – richer than the Romanovs – Felix was the oldest surviving male heir to the huge fortune. Although he was clever and quick-witted, he faced criticism for avoiding service during World War I. As the husband of Alexander Romanov's niece, Princess Irina of Russia, he disliked the influence that Rasputin held over the family, and became a key player in the plot to bring about his downfall.

Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich

Dmitri was grandson of Alexander II of Russia and after his primary carer, his uncle, was killed by a revolutionary attack, he went to live with the Romanovs. He was known to be something of a playboy and these actions likely ruined plans for him to marry the eldest Romanov daughter, Olga. In his later life he moved to Paris and had an affair with Coco Chanel.

Vladimir Mitrofanovich Purishkevich

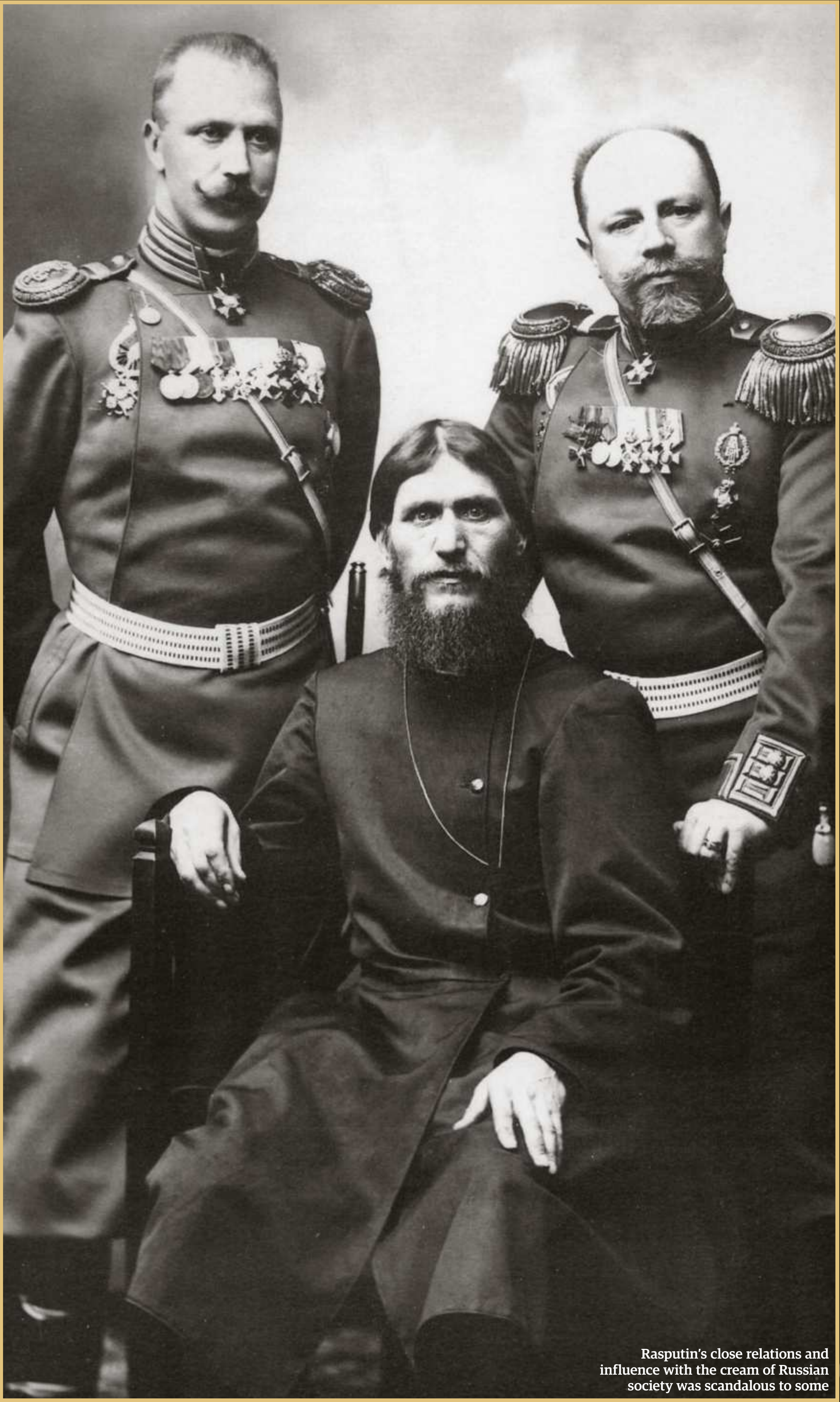
Born in Bessarabia, a region in Eastern Europe, Purishkevich followed his strong right-wing leanings and founded the Union of Russian People, a counter-revolutionary group. He was then elected to the Russian Duma, but he was a disruptive presence. Behind the scenes he was working on a plan to rid the country of Rasputin's influence for good.

Stanislaus de Lazovert

Originally born in Poland, Lazovert moved to Russia and crossed paths with Purishkevich during WWI. Trained as a doctor, it was Lazovert who was given the task of lacing the cakes with poison – potassium cyanide to be exact. Claiming to have used a dose large enough to kill several men, Rasputin somehow survived. It has since been argued that Lazovert's will failed him and he in fact couldn't poison the cakes.

Sergei Mikhailovich Sukhotin

A lieutenant in the Preobrazhensky Regiment, one of the oldest elite regiments of the Imperial Russian Army, it is believed that Sukhotin was an old friend of Felix's but was injured near the beginning of the war. Little is known about Sukhotin beyond this, but it is likely he had some familiarity with the men to become embroiled in the plot.



Rasputin's close relations and influence with the cream of Russian society was scandalous to some

Lover of the Russian queen

Was Rasputin's relationship with Alexandra purely platonic, or were his charms too great to resist?

Alexandra had never really been a popular woman; the granddaughter of Queen Victoria, she was an immensely traditional person, and it was these beliefs that led the imperial family to leave St Petersburg. This disconnect from her own people was fated to be a constant aspect of her life, as she lived in seclusion with her husband and children. As family became her whole life, she leapt at the chance, any chance, to save her only son. The moment Rasputin's apparent powers bore fruit, she made him a key member of the royal entourage.

When Nicholas made the disastrous decision to assume supreme command of the Russian army, the country was essentially run by Alexandra and in turn Rasputin, as her most trusted advisor. She proceeded to dismiss ministers and their deputies, making enemies left, right and centre. This hatred soon gave rise to rumours; people began to believe the two hated figures were secretly part of a pro-German group. Rasputin was painted as a dark, manipulative demon, and Alexandra as a hysterical, easily persuaded woman.

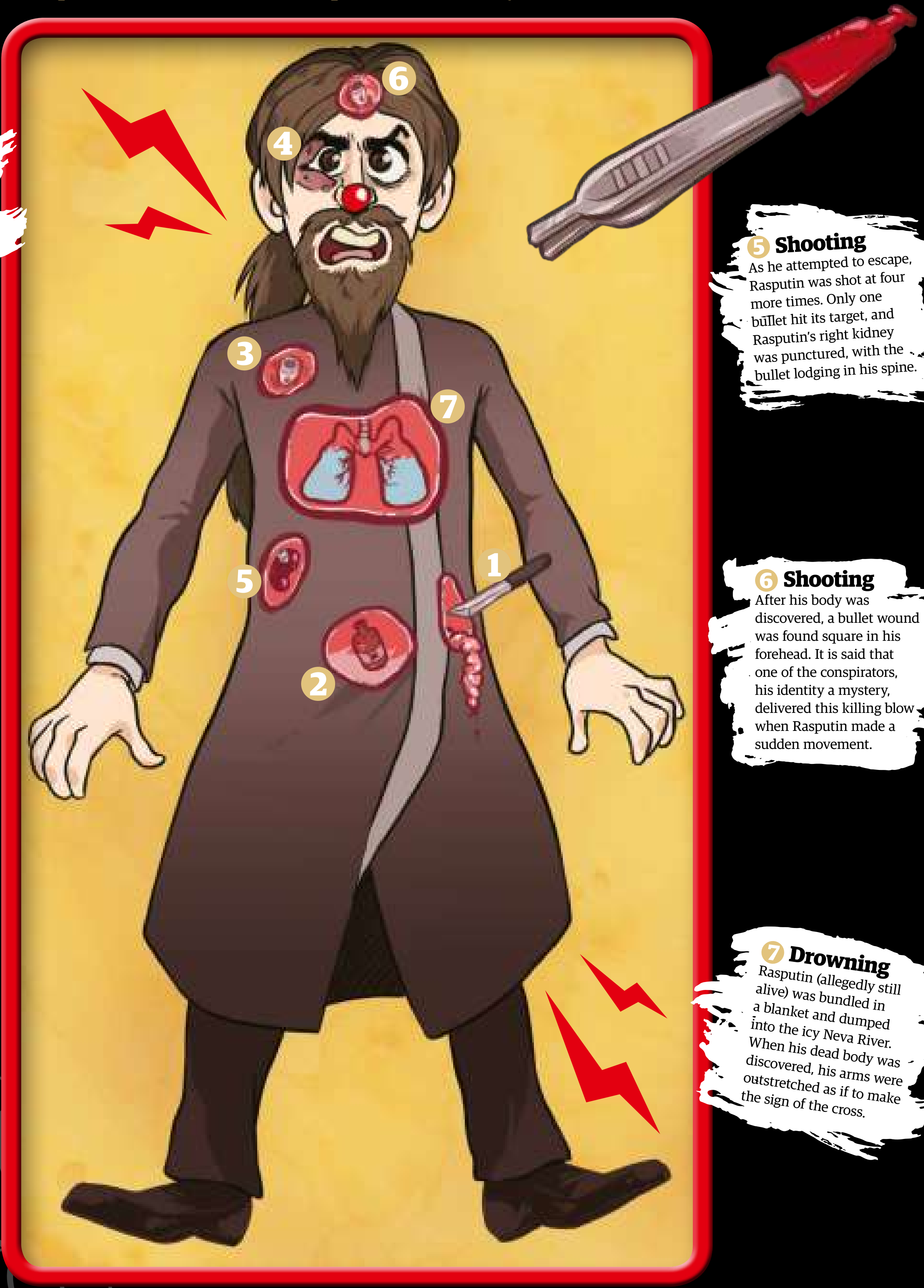
The public began to believe that the Germans, through Rasputin, had the imperial family in their clutches. The 'Mad Monk' already had a reputation as a womaniser, and now it was thought he had seduced the most important woman in Russia. Alexandra ignored the rumours that Rasputin had openly said the tsar would let him have sex with his wife whenever he wanted. The tsarina was accustomed to writing flowery letters to all her close companions, but when her letters to Rasputin fell into the wrong hands, they were catastrophically misinterpreted.

Pornographic caricatures of the two were produced and Rasputin became the most hated man in Russia. On the tsarina's part, she had many faults, but committing affairs was not one of them. It is more likely that she was drawn to Rasputin as she believed he the only man capable of saving her beloved son, and she was willing to put up with all the rumours and slander in the world for that.

Alexandra had the nickname 'Sunny', which her mother and husband called her

The many lives of Rasputin

As his conspirators discovered, Rasputin was a very difficult man to kill



① Stabbing
A former prostitute stabbed Rasputin in the gut so violently that his entrails fell from his stomach. She also screamed, "I've killed the antichrist!" However, he survived after surgery.

② Poison
Fuelled by the country's hate, a group of conspirators lured Rasputin to their home and encouraged him to dine on wine and cyanide-laced cakes. Despite consuming enough poison to kill several men, he was nevertheless unaffected.

③ Shooting
After Rasputin failed to be affected by the poison, one of the conspirators rushed upstairs then returned with a revolver. Rasputin was shot through the chest. The bullet went clean through his body, but he still wasn't dead.

④ Beating
After falling to the floor having been shot, Rasputin tried to escape through the yard. The conspirators chased after him and beat him with a rubber club when they caught up.

⑤ Shooting
As he attempted to escape, Rasputin was shot at four more times. Only one bullet hit its target, and Rasputin's right kidney was punctured, with the bullet lodging in his spine.

⑥ Shooting
After his body was discovered, a bullet wound was found square in his forehead. It is said that one of the conspirators, his identity a mystery, delivered this killing blow when Rasputin made a sudden movement.

⑦ Drowning
Rasputin (allegedly still alive) was bundled in a blanket and dumped into the icy Neva River. When his dead body was discovered, his arms were outstretched as if to make the sign of the cross.

health went on to improve and Alexandra became convinced Rasputin was responsible for his recovery. Rasputin's place in the royal household was secured.

Although Rasputin's role was primarily as a healer to Alexei, he became a close confidant of the family, even occasionally serving as an advisor to the tsar himself. For example, he warned Nicholas about entering World War I, urging him to instead make peace with Germany. Nicholas, of course, went along with the war anyway, which was a huge and costly mistake to the country and to his own reputation. However, Rasputin's easy access and apparent influence over the household did not go unnoticed. Living in an apartment on Gorokhovaya street, Rasputin was frequently visited by peasants seeking his assistance, but even more so by members of the aristocracy, many of whom planned to use him to gain their own favour at court.

Rasputin became very close to the Romanovs, especially the Tsarina and the Tsarevich

> "She was not a weak woman, but she was ultimately at the whim of a man able to command immense power"

There were others, however, who were less than fond of the strange peasant. Malicious rumours concerning Rasputin began to resurge - that he seduced women with his charm, using his power to organise secret sex rituals. For many who had met the 'Mad Monk' in passing, these claims were not out of the question, as he was seen to be overly intimate with women and his eyes, by all accounts, were oddly hypnotising. One memoir from the period wrote of Rasputin: "What eyes he has! You cannot endure his gaze for long. There is something difficult in him, it is like you can feel the physical pressure, even though his eyes sometimes glow with kindness, but how cruel can they be and how frightful in anger…" Many who had first adored the curious man were swept up in the hate campaign against him.

Some of Rasputin's enemies went to Nicholas and Alexandra directly to warn them of his influence, but both were quick to dismiss them. When Nicholas was urged to exile him to Tobolsk he commented, "I know Rasputin too well to believe all the tittle-tattle about him." One of the most damning accusations against Rasputin was that he was a member of the Khlysty, an underground sect split off from the Orthodox Church. The fact that he was a good dancer, and the sect was known for their dances and possible sexual promiscuity, seemed to add fuel to the accusation. Many figures in the Orthodox Church leapt on this, accusing him of immoral practises.

Against such a torrent of abuse, Nicholas had no choice but to investigate the holy man. However, after two months with nothing uncovered, the investigation ended. Anyone who criticised Rasputin was condemned by a royal family pushed to the brink. Politicians who spoke out against him often found themselves relieved of their positions, and more willing, obedient men were put in their place. Rasputin's influence now went beyond the Royal family and into politics as well. Even Bishop Theophan attempted to persuade the tsar to put some distance between himself and Rasputin, but was dismissed. Whether the allegations against Rasputin were true or not, many people now had a legitimate reason to loathe him.

If Nicholas wasn't willing to condemn Rasputin with the rest of them, then the two of them would burn together. By associating and supporting a man who was regarded by many as a licentious, perverted and even evil force, Nicholas did little to bolster his own reputation. This reached an extreme when the tsar took supreme command of the Russian armies during WWI. As this meant frequent trips away from the capital, his wife was put in charge of domestic policy alongside the only advisor she now trusted - Rasputin. The backlash was immediate; all the ministers

Daughter of the 'mad monk'

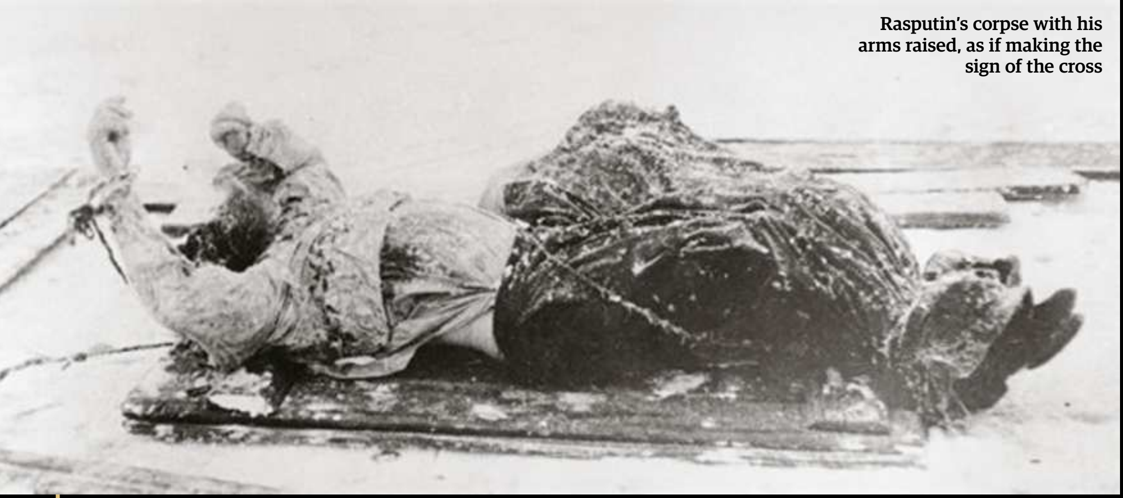
Forced to flee from Russia, Maria Rasputin led a life almost as eventful as her father's

When Rasputin abandoned his life of crime to become a holy man, horse thievery was not the only thing he left behind. He also said goodbye to his wife and three children: Dmitri, Maria and Varvara. It must have been peculiar for the children when their father returned as he had undergone a startling transformation, from vagabond to holy man. Maria recorded all her memories of her father in her diaries as she grew up, even complaining about his strict rules and long hours of prayer, "for which everything, anniversaries or penitences, served as an excuse." Maria eventually followed her father to the hallowed halls of St Petersburg in order to be trained to become a proper lady. She quickly became friends with the imperial family, but as we know, this was ill-fated. Maria's world was torn apart as her father was assassinated and later, her new friends, the Romanovs. It is rumoured that it was Maria who was forced to identify her father's body.

As Russia was torn apart Maria escaped and lived a fugitive's existence, constantly fleeing the entrapments of the Red Army. Maria travelled across all of Europe, married a man of 'dubious character', had two daughters, and lost her husband all in less than a decade. As Maria's family members disappeared, she performed across the continent as a cabaret dancer, while penning a staunch defence of her father entitled *The Real Rasputin*. The book and its successor, *My Father*, painted a very different portrait of her loathed and despised father. The Rasputin in Maria's text was closer to a pious saint and she claimed her enemies were responsible for the common perception of him. Maria continued to travel across Europe, but this time as a lion tamer in a travelling circus. Eventually Maria's non-stop lifestyle was forced to an end when she was mauled by a bear. Despite surviving the attack, her circus career was over, and she moved to Los Angeles and finally settled into a quiet life.

Maria (third from left) claimed to be psychic and said that Betty Ford came to her in a dream

A post-mortem photograph of Rasputin - a bullet wound can clearly be seen in his forehead



Rasputin's corpse with his arms raised, as if making the sign of the cross

threatened to resign, the nobles loudly voiced their disgust at Nicholas' decision and pleaded with him to think again - but Rasputin's own headstrong determination had rubbed off on the impressionable tsar and he stood his ground.

Just as they had feared, Rasputin became Alexandra's close personal confidant. She was not a weak woman, but she was ultimately entirely at the whim of a man able to command immense power by speaking softly while dressed in rags. Rasputin ordered that the tsarina persuaded a far weaker man to obey - her husband. In this way Rasputin held the fate of Russia, and all of its citizens, within his hands. For the many who viewed him as a weird, immoral and dangerous peasant, this was simply unacceptable.

It is difficult to know exactly what Rasputin, at this time, believed. His entire demeanour was said to have changed immensely after an assassination attempt in 1914, and it is quite possible that the near-death experience made him a little warier of trusting people. Although he was said to be strict and somewhat harsh with his words, there is no evidence to prove that Rasputin was ever violent or cruel. His character was, and always had been, independent, headstrong and in possession of incredible self-belief.

Whether he thought he was doing the right thing or not, Rasputin had made some very

The bloody end of a dynasty

When Nicholas II abdicated his throne, it marked the end of a history of tsardom that stretched back to Ivan IV 'The Terrible'

Nicholas II had never been a natural ruler and his father had not prepared him to rule believing that, as he was in his forties, he had a great many years yet. He was wrong and Nicholas, young, naive and ill-prepared became tsar aged just 26. This was the beginning of a reign that was clouded by bad judgements, mistakes and a blindness to the plight and opinions of his subjects. After the revolution of 1905 Nicholas had promised to listen to his people's demands for basic civil liberties, but because of his strong belief in the divine right of tsars, these promises were soon revoked.

After leading his country into disastrous and costly wars, conditions in Russia worsened. Food was scarce, soldiers died in their tens of thousands and defeat after defeat destroyed any confidence the people had in their leader. Prices soared and riots tore through the country, leaving the nation completely disillusioned by a regime that didn't seem to care about their welfare at all. Revolution was inevitable.

Nicholas ordered that the demonstrators be dealt with, and some 200 citizens were shot dead in the street. Eventually even the army garrison at Petrograd, the oldest and most loyal regiment, joined the fight and Nicholas had no choice but to abdicate his throne, aged 48.

Nicholas and his family were quickly exiled and imprisoned, forced to live on soldiers' rations, as they remained unaware of their ultimate fate. It was believed the tsar may eventually be put on trial, but the events of 17 July 1918 changed everything. Though there are many conflicting accounts, it is believed the family was awoken in the early hours and were led down to a basement room under the guise of safety.

However, as they assembled in the room a firing squad of seven communist soldiers filed in. With time only to splutter, "What? What?" Nicholas was shot dead. Only the young children survived the first hail of bullets, their jewel-laden dresses shielding them, but they were soon ran through with bayonets and shot in the head at close range. The elimination was not only of the family, but also of the line of tsars in Russia. The people believed they were better to rule themselves rather than rely on the aristocracy. However, they ultimately discovered that normal men could be just as terrible as tsars.

After their murders the Romanovs were canonised as martyrs by the Russian Orthodox Church, though outside of Russia

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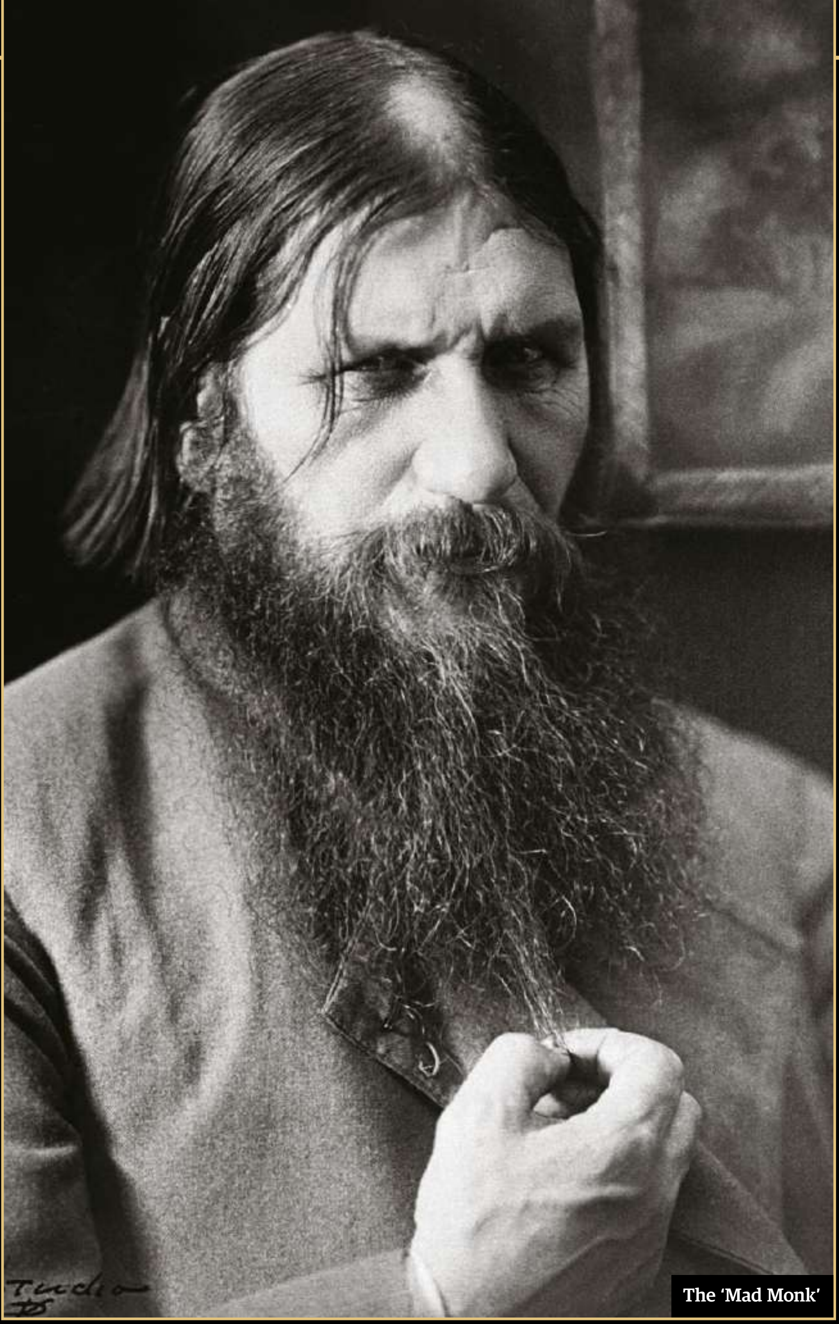
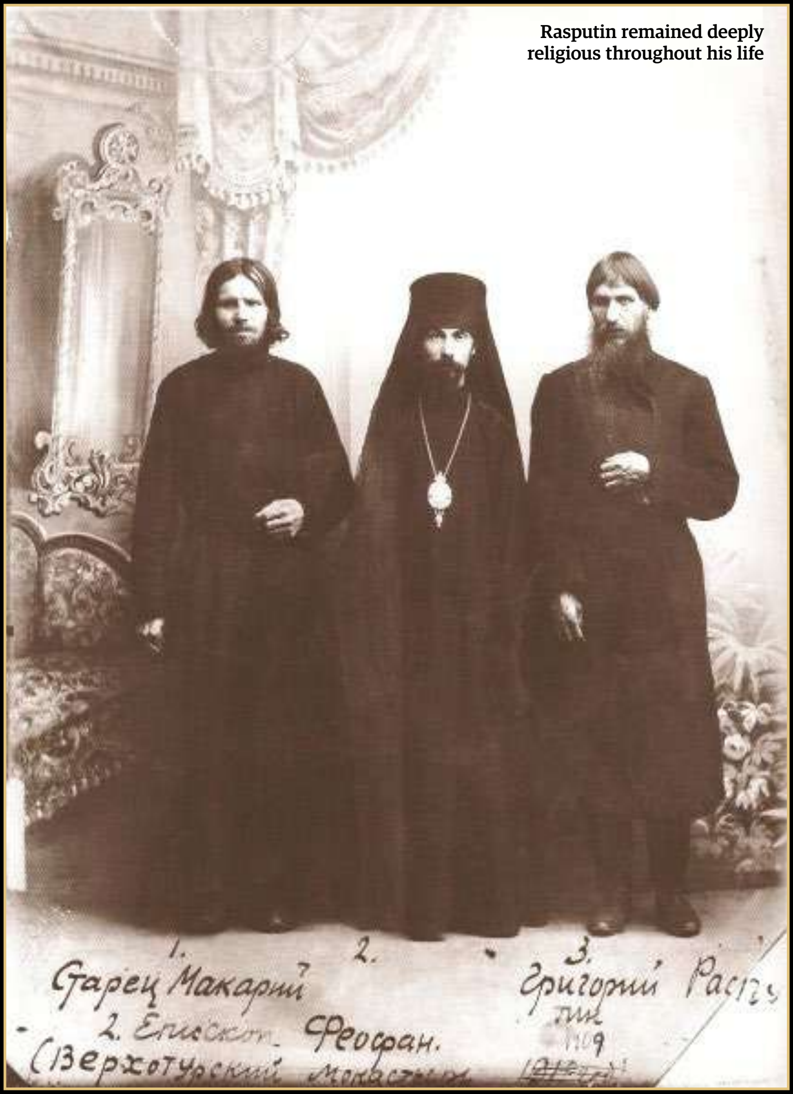


The 'Mad Monk'



Rasputin remained deeply religious throughout his life

> "There were many who doubted Rasputin, who called him a charlatan and a fake that coerced people with pretty words"

dangerous enemies. With the tsarina refusing to acknowledge that he was a bad influence, the nobles decided to take matters into their own hands and eliminate the threat to Russia themselves. A group of conspirators, including the tsar's first cousin and a member of parliament, tricked Rasputin into meeting with them under the pretence of meeting the tsar's niece. Rasputin entered the Yusupov Palace on the night of 17 December 1916 and was not seen alive again. His disappearance was noted immediately the next morning, and a search began. His body was finally discovered, frozen solid beside the riverbank of the Malaya Nevka River. The man with the hypnotising eyes was dead.

When the conspirators planned Rasputin's murder, their goal was likely to eliminate the powerful influence over the monarchy. However, the monarchy could not be saved, not even by destroying Rasputin. Russia was already hurtling off the cliff by the time he was murdered, and it was far too late to save it. In December 1916, Rasputin wrote a letter to the tsar about a peculiar prophecy, that if he was killed by the tsar's relations then "none of your children will remain alive for more than two years." He also predicted the tsar's death, and the coming of the antichrist, to plummet the country into plague and poverty. He also claimed that "the Russian land will die."

There were many contemporaries who doubted Rasputin, who called him a charlatan and a fake that coerced people with pretty words and a hypnotic gaze. They may have been correct, and we now have no way of knowing Rasputin's true power. However, the 'Mad Monk' was right about one thing - the Romanovs were overthrown ten weeks after his death and, just as he predicted, within two years the entire family was dead. It had been very easy to place blame at the feet of the peculiar travelling mystic, rather than the weak leader who was supposed to be a father to all, but now both were dead, and Russia faced an uncertain, tumultuous and - if Rasputin was right - dark future.

The magical life of Aleister Crowley

Mystic, philosopher, author, poet, controversialist, adventurer through the landscape of the mind – there were few taboos that the so-called 'wickedest man in the world' did not explore

Written by Joel McIver

If the late Aleister Crowley had been born in 1975, rather than 1875, his public antics as a magician, drug user and sexual experimenter would have been welcomed, or at least tolerated, in the modern world. In his own era, however, his keen interest in occult thought and practice, plus his deliberate attempts to gain infamy for its own sake, provoked rather than intrigued the public, and he was castigated as a serious threat. In reality, Crowley was simply an interesting, if unorthodox, man who loved the attention which his activities brought to him. There is no equivalent to him today – which makes the story of his life all the more compelling.

Much has been written about Crowley as an occult thinker and activist, and also about his personal life. In fact, these two sides of his character are too deeply entwined for them to be meaningfully separated. From his earliest years, he found himself in conflict with his surroundings – and it's little wonder that he grew up to be a man profoundly at odds with the mores of his era.

Edward Crowley, as he was known until his late teens, was born at 30 Clarendon Square in Royal Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, to a family of comfortable means. His father, also Edward Crowley, owned a share in a successful brewing business, Crowley's Alton Ales, and had already retired by the time his son was born. Like his wife Emily, Edward senior was a member of the Exclusive Brethren, a faction of the better-known Plymouth Brethren, which was a Christian

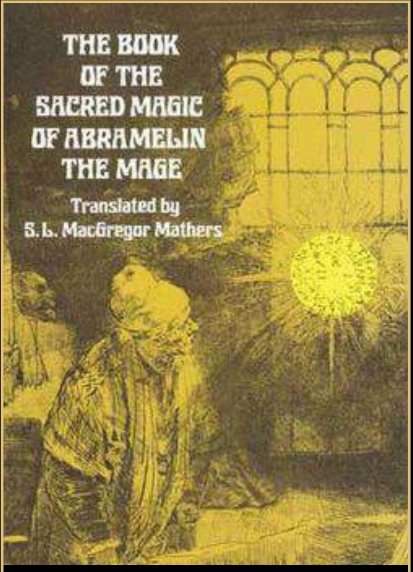
Ceremonial garments were an integral part of Crowley's rituals, but they often caused people to dismiss him as a serious thinker

How to perform the Abramelin Ritual

Abramelin was a 14th-century Egyptian magician and the subject of study by Crowley's associate Samual Mathers. He is said to have created the Abramelin Ritual (or Operation), in which a devout person can receive "knowledge and conversation of their Higher Guardian Angel". The Ritual was originally intended to last a gruelling 18 months, but Crowley adapted it to last a more manageable six. Fancy a crack at it? Here's how…

First, you need to be in good health, between 25 and 50 years old, and religious. It doesn't matter which religion you adhere to, you just need to acknowledge a god of some kind. You'll need two rooms, a prayer room and an adjoining bedroom, in which you will remain most of the time. For the first two months, spend the hours of daylight (yes, all of them) praying to your chosen deity, studying holy books and taking the occasional walk. For the second two months, include a day of fasting in each week.

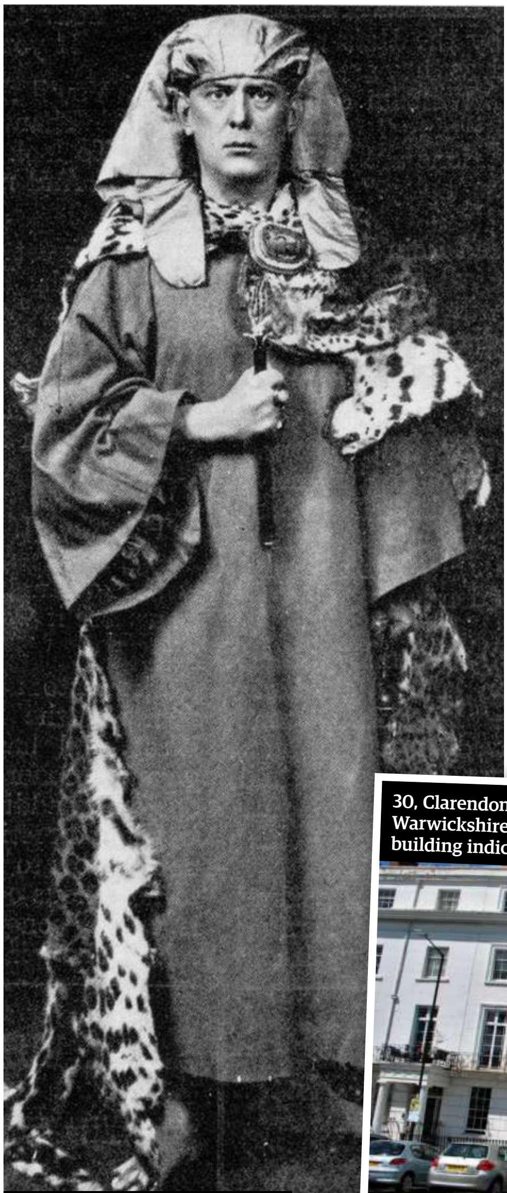
Over the last two months, wear a special tunic, burn charcoal, build an altar and get ready for the big day. When it comes, anoint yourself in sacred oil, write Crowley's sacred texts on your altar, invoke the 12 Kings and Dukes of Hell – including Lucifer, Satan, Leviathan and Belial – and await the arrival of your angelic visitor.



Samuel Mathers' *Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin* (1900), in which Mathers detailed the exhausting Abramelin Ritual

movement. He is said to have worked as a preacher for the Brethren and to have read Bible chapters to his wife and son every day. Certain lurid passages in the Book of Revelation concerning the Beast, its number 666 and the tale of the Scarlet Woman fascinated the young Crowley.

An early turning point for the boy came in 1883, when his father died of tongue cancer. Aged only 11, Crowley inherited one-third of his father's wealth, but this does not seem to have made him happy. His relationship with his mother deteriorated; he later wrote that "her powerful maternal instincts were suppressed by religion to the point that she became, after her husband's death, a brainless bigot of the most narrow, logical and inhuman type." Emily's brother Tom Bishop, also a conservative Christian, found no favour with his nephew, who described him with the perhaps exaggerated words "no more cruel fanatic, no meaner villain, ever walked the Earth".



Crowley in the ceremonial garb of the Order of the Golden Dawn, an occult organisation

Worst of all, when Crowley began to cause trouble at his school, Ebor Preparatory School in Cambridge, its owner, the Reverend Henry d'Arcy Champney, was quick and sadistic in his discipline. Crowley was punished by being placed in solitaire, or 'Coventry', where no student or master could speak to him, or he to them. He was fed only with bread and water, forced to walk around the schoolroom and isolated on the playground. These sadistic measures led him to describe his stay at Ebor as "a boyhood in hell". A satanic edge was lent to the situation by his mother's nickname for her son – "the Beast".

The pressures of the young Crowley's situation led him to ill health, firstly with albuminuria, a kidney disorder. This was no doubt worsened by some of the other boys at Ebor, who saw fit to punch him in the kidneys when they discovered his illness. In due course, his mother and uncle removed him from the tender mercies of Reverend Champney and sent him to Malvern College and Tonbridge School, neither of which he enjoyed.

Ultimately he was educated by private tutors in Eastbourne, East Sussex, against whose Christian teachings the teenage Crowley rebelled by pointing out flaws in the Bible. Privately, he enjoyed the forbidden practice of masturbation, of which he wrote: "Here was certainly a sin worth sinning, and I applied myself with characteristic vigour to its practice." This habit soon graduated to sleeping with local prostitutes, one of whom he later contracted gonorrhoea from.

30, Clarendon Square in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire - Crowley's birthplace. The building indicates the wealth of his family

"Crowley rebelled by pointing out flaws in the Bible"

From today's comparatively enlightened point of view, we can see clearly that the scene was set and the seeds were sown for Crowley's career of anti-establishment activities to begin. Here was a young man, barely more than a boy, jolted by his early death of his father (who he later described as a "hero", apparently sincerely), repelled by over-eager disciplinarians and contemptuous of revealed religion. As an intelligent, educated youth with money of his own, he was free - once he left the family home, at least - to wreak the worst kind of havoc that he could.

In 1895, Crowley adopted the first name Aleister. "I had read in some book or other," he wrote, "that the most favourable name for becoming famous was one consisting of a dactyl [a long syllable plus two short ones] followed by a spondee [two long syllables], as at the end of a hexameter: like Jeremy Taylor. 'Aleister Crowley' fulfilled these conditions and Aleister is the Gaelic form of Alexander. To adopt it would satisfy my romantic ideals."

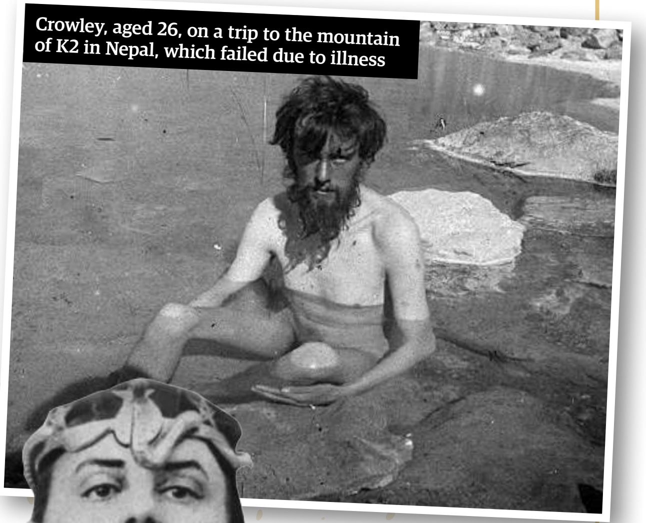
In line with his new identity, Crowley developed new interests - chess and mountaineering among them, both of which he indulged after beginning a degree in philosophy at Trinity College, Cambridge. He also wrote poetry for student newspapers such as *The Granta* and *Cantab*, switching his degree to English literature.

In 1896, at the age of 21, he endured another paradigm change. Before this point Crowley had been just another regular, if rebellious, young man - afterwards, he was a keen devotee of the mystical world. It's thought that he enjoyed a homosexual liaison while on holiday in Sweden, although this was never confirmed. Whatever the case, Crowley returned a changed man, apparently comfortable with being bisexual at a time when this was generally deemed abhorrent. He then struck up a relationship with Herbert Charles Pollitt, the president of the Cambridge University Footlights Dramatic Club, and the two men were a couple for two years, eventually breaking up when Crowley's interest in Western esotericism became all-consuming.

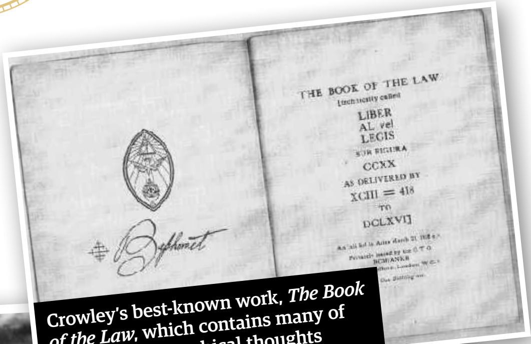
The final opportunity for Crowley to pursue a 'normal' career came and went in 1897 when he travelled to Russia in the employ of the British secret service, which had attempted to enlist him as a spy. However, a spate of illness deterred Crowley from the idea of working for a living - no doubt helped by the fact that he was a man of independent means - and he resolved to pursue his obsession with the occult, now a huge driving passion for him. In 1898 he abandoned his university studies, not bothering to sit his final exams, even though his record indicated that he would probably do well if he had chosen to take them.

Where did all this unrest come from? Perhaps Crowley's desire to be a poet (he published several poems in 1898, some of them of an erotic nature); possibly his new interest in alchemy (he had met a chemist, Julian L Baker, of similar views to his own); or simply his occult readings.

Some biographers suggest that Crowley remained a British Intelligence spy throughout his life


Crowley, aged 26, on a trip to the mountain of K2 in Nepal, which failed due to illness

Crowley in magisterial mode in 1912. As the First World War approached, his activities began to adopt a political edge



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Crowley's best-known work, *The Book of the Law*, which contains many of his early philosophical thoughts

Two books, AE Waite's *The Book of Black Magic and of Pacts* (1898) and Karl von Eckartshausen's *The Cloud Upon the Sanctuary* (1896), influenced Crowley profoundly. He took an important step into making these interests concrete by joining an occult society known as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, which had been founded in 1888. He was introduced to the Order by George Cecil Jones, Baker's brother in-law.

Although Crowley was introduced to two influential people through the Order - its leader Samuel Mathers, and a magician named Allan Bennett, who later shared Crowley's flat in Chancery Lane - his connection with the organisation was rocked by disagreement. While Bennett taught Crowley about the Goetia (the summoning of demons), the ritual use of drugs (in particular hashish, legal to use in Britain until 1928) and Kabbalah (ancient Jewish mysticism), Crowley wanted to move faster through the Order's ranks than was permitted.

By now determined to explore the world of the occult to its limit, in 1899 Crowley purchased a Scottish mansion, Boleskine House, on the shore of Loch Ness. Here he attempted the exhausting Abramelin Operation, a six-month ritual in which a disciple seeks to converse with a personal guardian angel, invoking demonic spirits at the same time. The same year he published more poetry collections, one of which, *Jephthah*, was a success.

Although Crowley made progress through the various grades of the Order of the Golden Dawn, he was unpopular in the group thanks to the reputation he had gained from being a bisexual sybarite, and he conflicted with members including the poet WB Yeats. The Order's London lodge refused to allow him entry into its Second Order, although Samuel Mathers did so after Crowley visited him in Paris. This caused a schism between Mathers and the Order, which became irrevocable when Crowley - on Mathers' orders - attempted to storm and occupy the Order's temple building in Kensington. The case went to court, and the Order won - Crowley and Mathers were expelled.

However, Crowley was just getting started on his bizarre journey, both physical and spiritual. In 1900 he travelled to Mexico, where he settled in Mexico City with a local mistress and worked with Enochian magic. While there he was initiated into the Freemasons, wrote poems and a play and climbed mountains such as Iztaccihuatl, Popocatepetl and Colima. He then headed to San Francisco and Hawaii, enjoying an affair with a married woman named Mary Rogers on the ship for good measure.

After stopovers in Japan and Hong Kong, Crowley reached Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon), where he met Allan Bennett, who had moved there to study Shaivism; the latter decided to train as a Buddhist monk and went to Burma. Crowley chose to to travel to India, studing raja yoga, a variant of Hindu astrology.

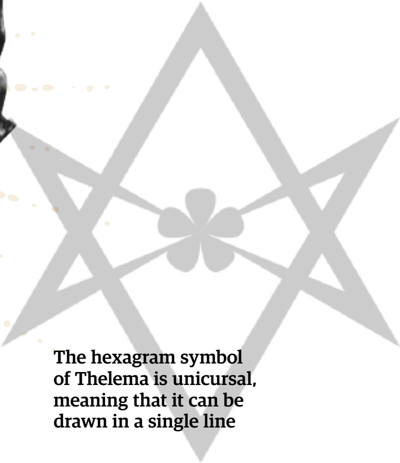
The sheer amount of esoteric beliefs that Crowley had absorbed by this point was prodigious. Still only in his late 20s, his greatest period of activity - both physical and mental - was upon him. In 1902 he attempted to climb the mountain K2, which had not yet been conquered at the time. However, influenza, malaria and snow blindness meant that his group only made it to 6,100 metres before turning back.

Later that year he settled in Paris, where he gained a measure of local fame among the urban

Crowley with his wife Rose and his second daughter Lola Zaza, pictured in 1910

Pictured around 1890, Edward Crowley, as he was then known, showed no outward sign of the chaos to come

This 1935 image originally ran in *Picture Post* in 1955 in an article titled 'The Man Who Chose Evil'. But did he?



The hexagram symbol of Thelema is unicursal, meaning that it can be drawn in a single line intelligentsia. As a published poet, occult scholar and man of deviant sexual habits by the standard of the day, he was welcomed in fin-de-siècle Paris and became friends with the painter Gerald Kelly and the author W Somerset Maugham. Art, philosophy and his extraordinarily vivid lifestyle coalesced for Crowley this year, making him one of the outstanding figures of his time – a view that he himself was quick to endorse.

Another key moment in his personal evolution came in 1904. By then Crowley had returned to Boleskine House, married Gerald's sister Rose – deeply distressing the Kelly family in doing so – and travelled with her to Cairo, where the couple claimed to be a prince and princess for their own, arcane reasons. However, this was no simple pleasure trip. While in Cairo, Crowley underwent the most profound spiritual experience of his life.

On 18 March Rose – who had become delirious, in a form of hallucinatory trance – told Crowley that the Egyptian god Horus was waiting for him. Two days later, she announced, "The Equinox of the Gods has come!" She took him to a nearby museum, containing a 7th-century BCE mortuary stele known as the Stele of Ankh-ef-en-Khonsu. The exhibit's number was 666.

On 8, 9 and 10 April, for exactly one hour at noon on each day, Crowley – seated in his apartment – was addressed by a disembodied voice, identifying itself as Aiwass, the messenger of Horus. He claimed to have written down Aiwass' words verbatim, and soon after turned these words into a book, *Liber L vel Legis*, better known as *The Book of the Law*. The cornerstone of the book was the statement "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law", which may have been controversial at the time but now resonates in the era of libertarianism. This, and the book itself, became the foundation of a religion, Thelema, which Crowley went on to develop.

70 years after Crowley's death, the 'Do what thou wilt…' credo, *The Book of the Law* and Thelema itself are still very much part of any conversation on the subject of alternative belief systems. It's amazing to think that all this work was essentially done by the time he reached the age of 30. Of course, he continued to work at developing and disseminating his beliefs, returning once more to Boleskine and becoming a father to his first child, a daughter. He and Rose saw fit to saddle the child with the name Nuit Ma Ahathoor Hecate Sappho Jezebel Lilith Crowley, referring to her as Lilith (after the Biblical demon) for convenience.

Although he was admired in occult quarters for his work, Crowley's life was rarely easy from this point on. He fell out with Mathers, claiming that his former colleague had sent an 'astral vampire' to attack him; his books, published through his own Society for the Propagation of Religious Truth, never sold in large numbers; a failed expedition to climb Kanchenjunga in the Himalayas led to the deaths of many of the group; he was forced to leave India after shooting dead a man who tried to attack him; and

> "He took an important step into making these interests concrete by joining an occult society"

> The Kanchenjunga climb was conquered in 1955, 50 years after Crowley's own unsuccessful attempt

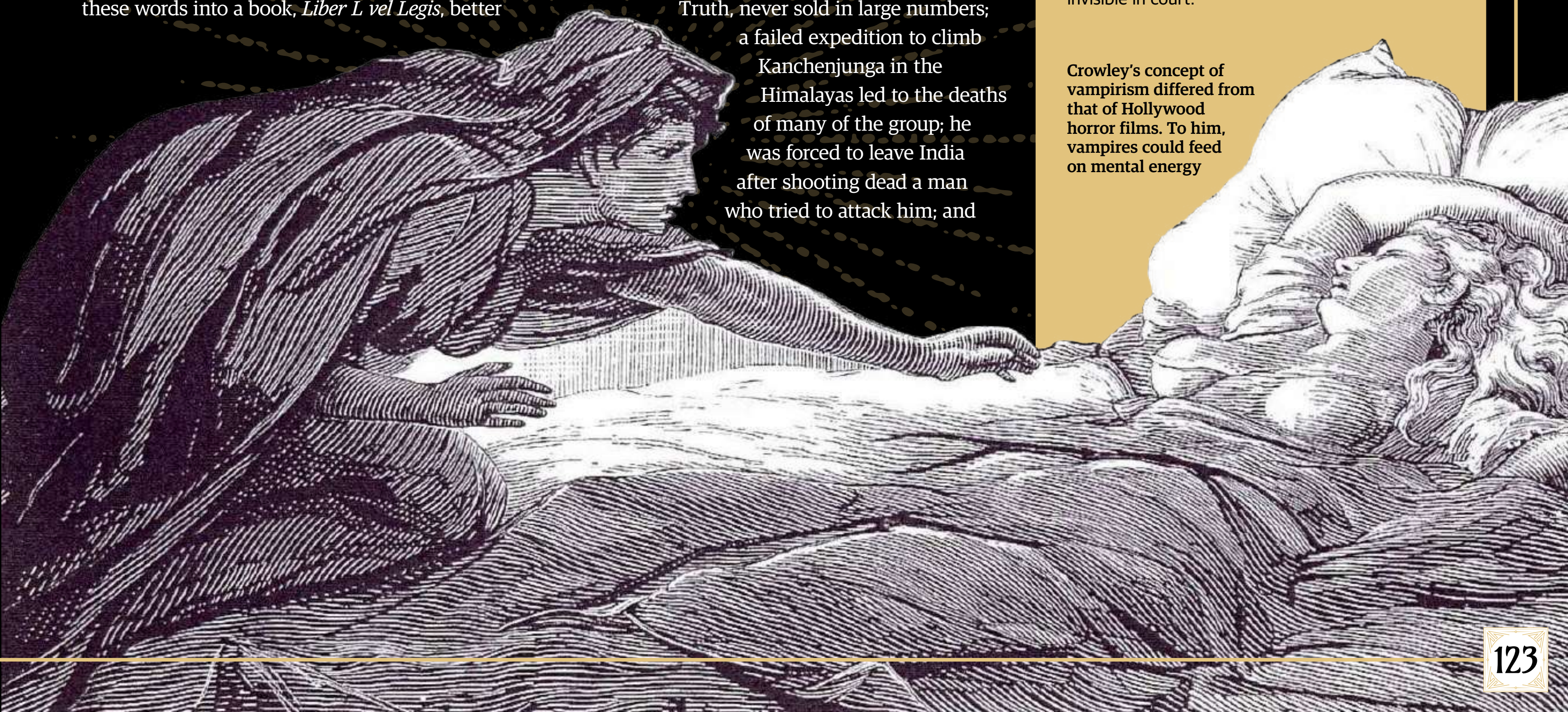
The claims of Crowley

Writing in *The London Sunday Dispatch* on 25 June 1933, Crowley outlined some of his more outrageous claims for the benefit of the readers. Whether they took him seriously or not, who can say? There is no doubt, however, that the tales of his occult explorations made for entertaining reading over tea and toast that morning.

Crowley spent a lot of time discussing his recent attempts to make himself invisible – a feat that he claimed to have partly achieved in front of a mirror. Venturing out in public, he realised that he could not be seen. "I was able to walk out in a scarlet-and-gold robe with a jeweled crown on my head without attracting any attention. They could not see me," he wrote.

Elsewhere, Crowley wrote of his falling-out with his former colleague in the Order of the Golden Dawn, Samuel Mathers, in fantastical terms. In particular, he claimed that Mathers had sent an 'astral vampire' to attack him. Vampirism in general was a subject that fascinated Crowley, but not of the familiar, Dracula-style bloodsucking type. To him, vampires could be psychic in nature, feeding on mental energy. This rendered them difficult to combat, as well as impossible to see – perhaps usefully for the purposes of Crowley's propaganda.

Needless to say, few people took ideas his about vampires seriously, and of his attempts at invisibility, the *Manchester Guardian* drily wrote in 1943, "Mr Crowley declines to make himself invisible in court."

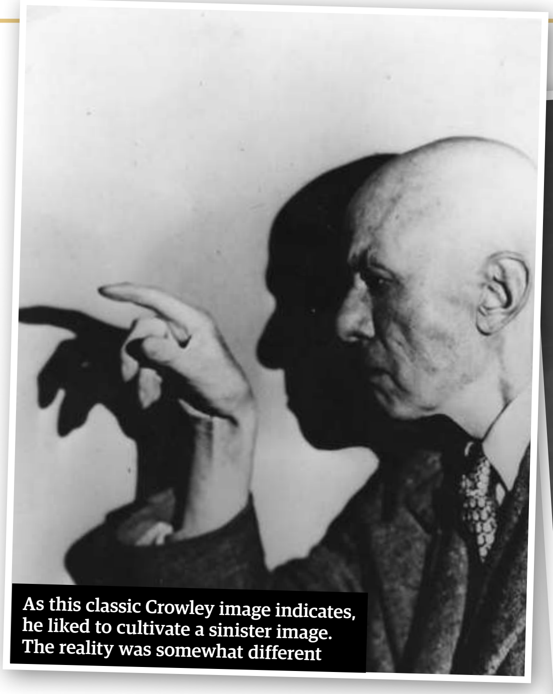


Crowley's concept of vampirism differed from that of Hollywood horror films. To him, vampires could feed on mental energy

Lilith sadly died at only two years old. Rose, by now suffering from alcoholism, bore a second daughter, Lola Zaza, although Crowley embarked on various affairs before divorcing Rose in 1909.

Through all this, Crowley continued to attempt the Abramelin Operation, completing it at a hotel in Surrey. He claimed afterwards to have achieved a state of samadhi, or union with God, as well as conversing once more with his old chum Aiwass and writing more Thelemic books as a result. Even supposing these supernatural liaisons were not fictional, they did nothing to help his finances, which were running out. He remained in a precarious financial state for the rest of his life, not helped by a growing addiction to cocaine.

Still, nothing could stop him from defying the conventions of the time. His relationship with a disciple, Victor Neuburg, was based on sadomasochism - while visiting Algeria, the pair engaged in a sex magic ritual on a mountain summit and invoked the demon Choronzon with a blood sacrifice. A vehicle was clearly required for his ongoing philosophy, and so he and George Cecil Jones founded the A∴A∴, a group that infused the ideals of the Order of the Golden Dawn with Thelemic thought. The group's temple was located at 124 Victoria Street in London, where a biannual pamphlet, *The Equinox*, was published.

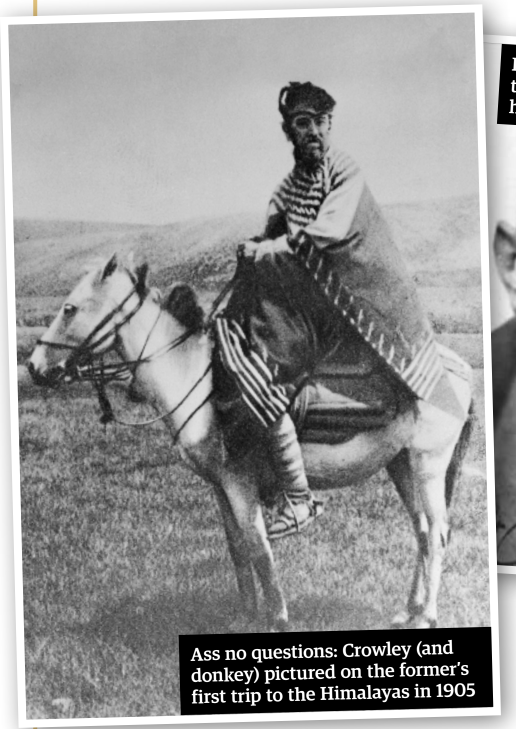

As this classic Crowley image indicates, he liked to cultivate a sinister image. The reality was somewhat different

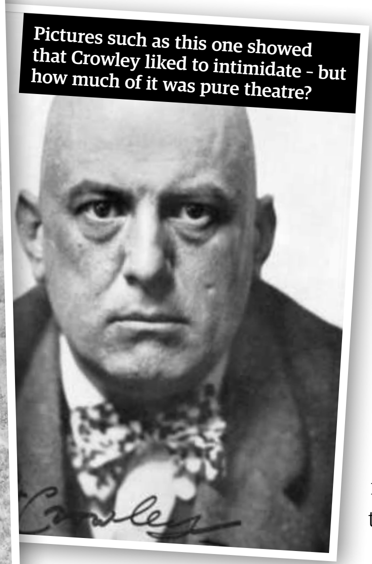
Crowley continued to write and publish into his middle years and beyond. In 1912 his *Book of Lies* gained some notoriety when Theodor Reuss, the head of yet another occult group, the German Ordo Tempo Occultis (OTO), accused Crowley of publishing some of the OTO's secrets. Crowley persuaded Reuss that he was innocent and the two became friends, with Reuss later appointing Crowley as the head of the OTO's British branch, the Mysteria Mystica Maxima. Hilariously, Crowley took upon himself the title of 'Baphomet, X° Supreme Rex and Sovereign Grand Master General of Ireland, Iona, and all the Britons'.

From now on, Crowley appeared at regular intervals in the popular press, with readers perceiving him as somewhere between a credible sorcerer and a clown. By 1914 he was broke, and sold Boleskine House to move to New York, where he worked as a double agent for the British government with great efficacy - even persuading a German spy called Sylvester Viereck to give him a job on his newspaper, *The Fatherland*.

Thelema was always Crowley's primary focus throughout the decades, and after leaving the USA in 1919, he returned to London, where he was attacked by a tabloid called *John Bull*. Accused of being a traitor in its pages, Crowley chose not to sue the newspaper, although his status as an intelligence officer was by now common knowledge. He had bigger things on his mind - not least an addiction to heroin, which had been prescribed to treat his asthma.

Moving away from the toxic environment of London, he relocated to Cefalù on Sicily, Italy, to


Ass no questions: Crowley (and donkey) pictured on the former's first trip to the Himalayas in 1905


Pictures such as this one showed that Crowley liked to intimidate - but how much of it was pure theatre?

Defining moment

Crowley turns to the occult 1897

While at Cambridge, Crowley lives a dissipated life, exploring sexual liaisons with male and female partners. He also becomes an expert mountain climber, travelling to the Alps with his friend Oscar Eckenstein and making the first unguided ascent of the Mönch peak. However, a previous - and undefined - mystical experience that he underwent in Stockholm in 1896 had set him on an esoterically spiritual path, and after a trip to Russia he suffers a short-lived period of illness. This leads Crowley to consider the reality of death and to dismiss all human endeavour as meaningless - and, although a diplomatic career is beckoning, he determines to pursue his burgeoning interest in occult matters.

Timeline

1875

Born in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire
Edward Alexander Crowley is born as the only child of Edward and Emily Crowley. His parents are members of the Exclusive Brethren, a Christian fundamentalist group.
12 October 1875

1887

Death of Crowley's father
The senior Edward Crowley dies in 1887 of tongue cancer when his son is only 11. Crowley later defines this moment as a turning point in his life, not least because he inherits a large fortune.
1887

1895

Changes name to Aleister
Dissatisfied with the name Edward, Crowley adopts the name Aleister and goes up to Trinity College, Cambridge, to study philosophy. Later he switches to English literature.
1895

1898

Order of the Golden Dawn
Crowley is initiated into the Outer Order of the Golden Dawn by the Order's leader, Samuel Mathers, later Crowley's close associate. He quickly progresses through the organisation's ranks.
18 November 1898

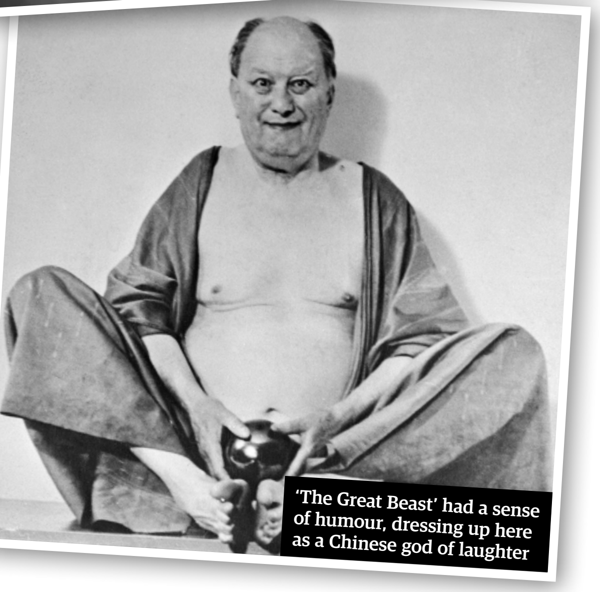
1899

Move to Boleskine House
Crowley styles himself as the 'laird of Boleskine' after buying this imposing property on Loch Ness. The house becomes infamous and is purchased in 1970 by Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page.
1899

1900

A spiritual journey
Having visited Mexico, the USA, Japan, Hong Kong and Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), Crowley studies the Hindu practice of raja yoga. He claims to have achieved dhyana, or a state of perfect awareness.
1900

Crowley and his second wife, Maria de Miramar, around 1930. The couple married to enable Maria to enter Britain



'The Great Beast' had a sense of humour, dressing up here as a Chinese god of laughter

found the Abbey of Thelema in a rented villa with like-minded Thelemites. A haven for sex magic and A∴A∴ rituals, the Abbey soon attracted a community of occult-obsessed individuals. For the four years of its existence, Crowley lived the contented, righteous life of a religious leader.

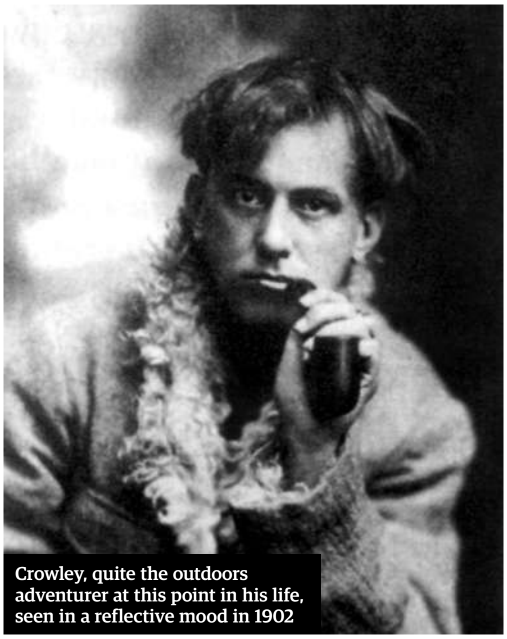
However, this came to an end when Benito Mussolini's fascist government heard inaccurate rumours of the goings-on at the Abbey and deported Crowley. A Thelemite by the name of Raoul Loveday had died after drinking polluted water; this was translated in *John Bull* as blood sacrifices and other scandalous activities. It was at this point that the paper labelled Crowley "the wickedest man in the world".

For all intents and purposes, that was the end of Crowley's life as a social pioneer. He lived out the rest of his days destitute and in poor health, although he was a prolific writer right up until the end. He was declared bankrupt in 1935, and then fathered a son, Randall Gair with a debutante named Deirdre Doherty, nicknaming the boy Aleister Atatürk. When World War II broke out two years later, Crowley was turned down by the Naval Intelligence Division when he offered them his services as a spy.

Crowley ended his days at a boarding house named Netherwood in Hastings, Sussex, where - perhaps aware that his time was limited - he spent his time appointing successors to the OTO and the A∴A∴. He died of chronic bronchitis, aggravated by pleurisy and myocardial degeneration, on 1 December 1947, aged 72 - actually a reasonable lifespan for someone beset by childhood illness and drug addictions in adulthood.

In some ways, Crowley had the last laugh. His funeral in Brighton was reported to be an unholy Black Mass by the tabloids, although it was no such thing, and his books continue to be popular even today. Thelemic principles still populate modern movements such as Wicca, while in America, the Church of Satan - popular in the heavy metal world and among atheists - bases its credo more or less exactly on 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law'.

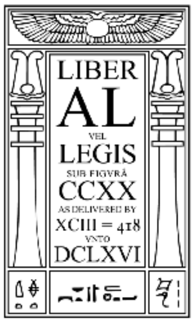
However, by the standards of Crowley, a shameless self-publicist, the fact that we're still talking about him and his philosophy seven decades after his death definitely represents nothing less than victory.



Crowley, quite the outdoors adventurer at this point in his life, seen in a reflective mood in 1902

Defining moment

The Book of the Law 8 April 1904



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While in Cairo, where he and his wife Rose invoke ancient Egyptian deities and study Islamic mysticism, Crowley hears a disembodied voice, delivering messages to him over a period of three days. The voice claims to be Aiwass, the messenger of Horus, also known as Hoor-Paar-Kraat. Crowley writes down these messages and collates them into his book *Liber L Vel Legis*, or *The Book of the Law*. In this volume he writes that the human race is poised to enter a new aeon of existence and that its prophet, unsurprisingly, is Crowley himself. His infamous slogan of 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law' is introduced here, and the book becomes the basis of his new religion - Thelema.

Defining moment

The Abbey of Thelema 1920

THELEMA
ABBEY ZONE

Moving to Cefalù in Sicily, Crowley rents a villa and names it the Abbey of Thelema. He later describes this period as one of perfect happiness, with each day devoted to rituals to Egyptian deities, masses, art, writing books and bringing up his acolytes' children. Sex, magic and other arcane practices evolve, and Crowley develops addictions to heroin and cocaine. A film star, Jane Wolfe, becomes a Thelemite, and thinkers of all types congregate at the Abbey. However, a series of scandals resulting from the death of a Thelemite, Raoul Loveday, and the publication of Crowley's book *Diary of a Drug Fiend* eventually lead to his deportation from Italy and the closure of the Abbey.

1905

Death on the mountain
Crowley attempts to climb Kanchenjunga in the Himalayas, but his team is fractured by disagreement and the other climbers abandon the ascent. They die in an accident for which Crowley is blamed.
1905

A debonair portrait of the soon-to-be "wickedest man in the world", taken around 1905

1907

Formation of the A∴A∴
Breaking away from the Order of the Golden Dawn, Crowley co-founds the A∴A∴, whose philosophy is a syncretic blend of many schools of thought. Its magazine is called *The Equinox*.
November 1907

1930

Fake death of Crowley
After a move to Berlin and then to Lisbon, Crowley fakes his own death. However, this doesn't stop him continuing his artistic, occult and sexual adventures across Europe.
April 1930

1947

Real death of Crowley
Crowley succumbs to chronic bronchitis, exacerbated by lung and heart disease, at the age of 72, a relatively old age for a man of his lifestyle. His funeral is inaccurately labelled a Black Mass by the tabloids.
1 December 1947

© Getty, Creative Commons; Erik Albers, Elisarolle

Séances

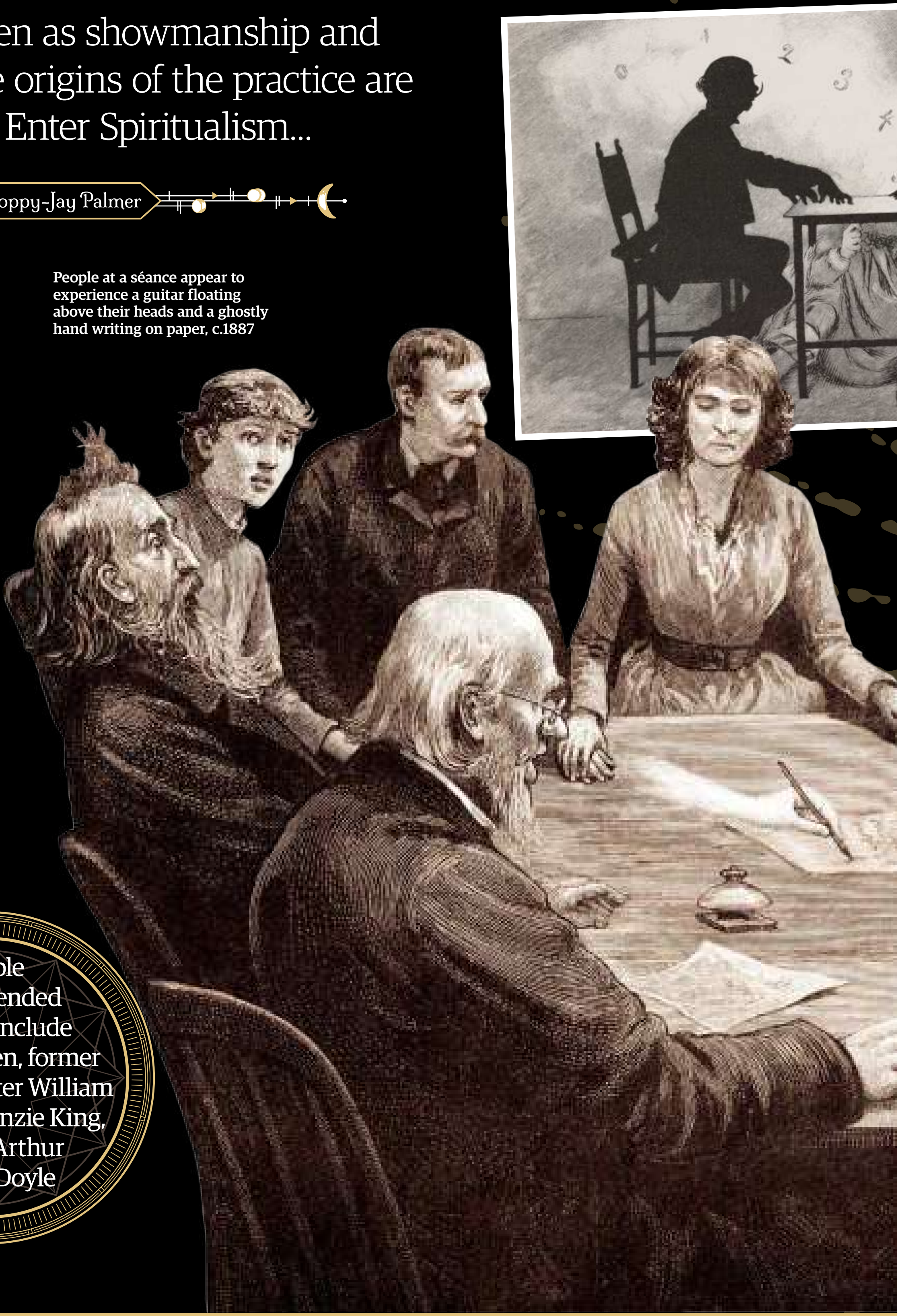
Séances are widely seen as showmanship and hoaxes by many, but the origins of the practice are rooted in religion. Enter Spiritualism…

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

The word 'séance' comes directly from the French 'séance', meaning 'seat' and 'session', from the Old French 'seoir', meaning 'to sit'. So if you are ever holding a séance and not all participants are sitting down, it's technically not a séance!

Séances were, and are, used as a method of contacting the spirit world and talking to those who are no longer with us. Proper séances can be traced back to the 3rd century, and even back then they were closely related to occult practices and brought fear to the hearts of non-believers. However, it wasn't until the 19th century that the popularity of séances began to balloon. That popularity came with the creation of the religion Spiritualism, with founding sisters Kate and Margaret Fox quickly becoming popular for holding public séances in New York with the aim of contacting the dead.

Over the years, five different types of séances have been developed: religious séances, which are used during services as a way of communicating with living personalities in the spirit world (Spiritualists like to refer to them as 'receiving messages'), stage mediumship séances, which are held on stage in front of paying audiences; leader-assisted séances, where a small group usually gathered around a table is led by a medium conducting it, informal social séances, which involve neither a leader nor any kind of religious context, and Spiritualist séances, during which a medium connects with the spirit world and all



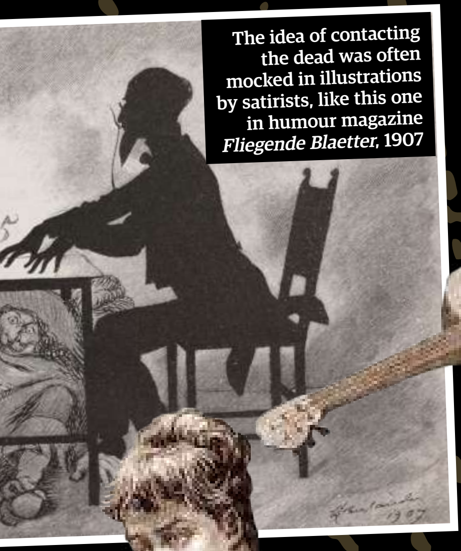
People at a séance appear to experience a guitar floating above their heads and a ghostly hand writing on paper, c.1887

People who attended séances include Robert Owen, former prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle present participants interact and speak with the personalities they believe they have summoned.

Some of the most famous séances of that particular era include those of First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, who organised several sessions in the White House while grieving the loss of her son. They were extremely high profile, and were attended by her husband President Abraham Lincoln as well as a number of other prominent members of US society.

Scientists, sceptics and atheists have always had more than their doubts. The art of the séance took a massive blow in 1887 with the Seybert Commission and its investigation into a number of respected Spiritualist mediums. Their report decried them as frauds and showmen. Outside of slumber parties, séances are still being used as part of the religious services of Spiritualists, Spiritist, and Espiritismo churches to this day, but they usually place more emphasis on the spiritual aspect than on the showmanship.

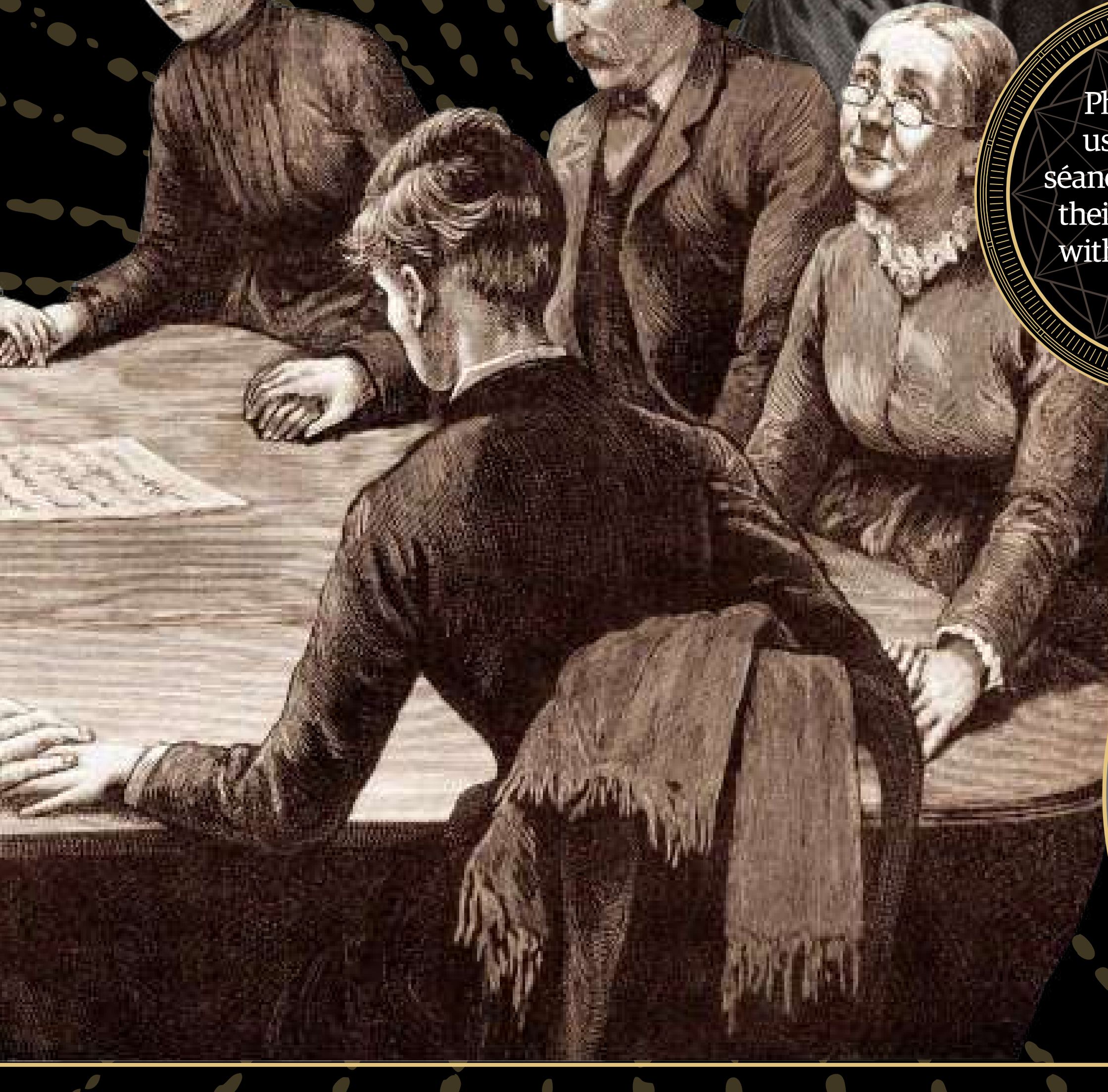
> "Séances were, and are, used as a method of contacting the spirit world"



The idea of contacting the dead was often mocked in illustrations by satirists, like this one in humour magazine *Fliegende Blaetter*, 1907

Séances gained popularity with the introduction of Spiritualism, a religion founded by Kate and Margaret Fox

© Alamy, Getty Images



> Photographers used to charge séance-goers to have their picture taken with the ghost of a loved one

The séance of Mary Todd Lincoln, during which she tried to contact her son, became one of the most notorious ever held

Hitler and the occult

The runes, rituals and star signs behind the rise and fall of the Third Reich

Written by James Hoare

"The Nazis were desperate," intones John Hurt's Professor Bruttenholm in Guillermo del Toro's 2004 dark fantasy film and comic adaptation, *Hellboy*. "Combining science and black magic, they intended to upset the balance of the war."

From the box office to bookshelves, the image of Nazi Germany being in league with black magic and old gods is ubiquitous. Though best characterised by the retro pulp of the *Indiana Jones* film series where the adventurous archaeologist races to keep relics from the pursuing jackboots, it's a far more long-lived trope than you might think.

A handful of early texts advanced the theory during the early days of World War II. *Hitler Speaks* (1939) by Hermann Rauschning, *Occult Causes of the Present War* (1940) by Lewis Spence and *Hitler et les Forces Occultes* (*Hitler at the Occult Forces*, 1939) by Edouard Saby all portrayed the Führer as a man driven by the demonic forces he could barely contain to one degree or another.

None of these writers had any exclusive insider knowledge of the inner workings of the Nazi Party. Rauschning leveraged his credibility as a former middle-ranking Nazi to greatly embellish his contact and conversations with Hitler. Spence was a Scottish folklorist and writer who projected his own occult knowledge onto the mystical manifestos of Hitler's fellow travellers. Saby was even further gone, seeing evidence of occult hand gestures in the Führer's photographs and equating vegetarianism with Satanism.

Facts that thin soon gave way to fiction and Dennis Wheatley wrote the supernatural thriller *Strange Conflict* in 1941, which told of Nazi witch doctors menacing the Atlantic convoys from South America. The Stephen King of his day, Wheatley rubbed velvet shoulders with English occultists such as Aleister Crowley and Montague Summers, and spent the war working for the London Controlling Section, a part of the byzantine British intelligence apparatus concerned with elaborate deception campaigns.

After the war ended, Wheatley's novels *They Used Dark Forces* (1964) and *Gateway to Hell* (1970) helped to keep the concept in the public imagination, leading to the first *Indiana Jones* movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), and from that into an endless parade of Nazi zombie movies and credulous cable shows exploring the Third Reich's myriad magical mysteries.

Why these stories endured then and why they endure now is largely the same. In 1939-40, the seemingly unstoppable advance of Nazi Germany as it rolled over its neighbours was difficult to understand without recourse to dark powers. In the aftermath of World War II, the horrific scale of the Holocaust, the devastation of aerial bombardment and the savagery of occupation defied easy understanding. Again, many took comfort in the belief that this wasn't the work of people just like themselves, but of monsters whose dark appetites drove them to seek out forbidden lore.

At its heart, though, is a kernel of truth and interest in the esoteric was surprisingly widespread in Nazi Germany. While the idea of a gimlet-eyed Führer driven by occult obsessions is absolute rubbish, the occult was indelibly bound up with Nazi Germany. It was a low hum of astrology, superstition, runes and mythology that underpinned 12 years in which the swastika fluttered above Berlin.

The twilight of reason

The spiritualists and secret societies at the birth of the Nazis

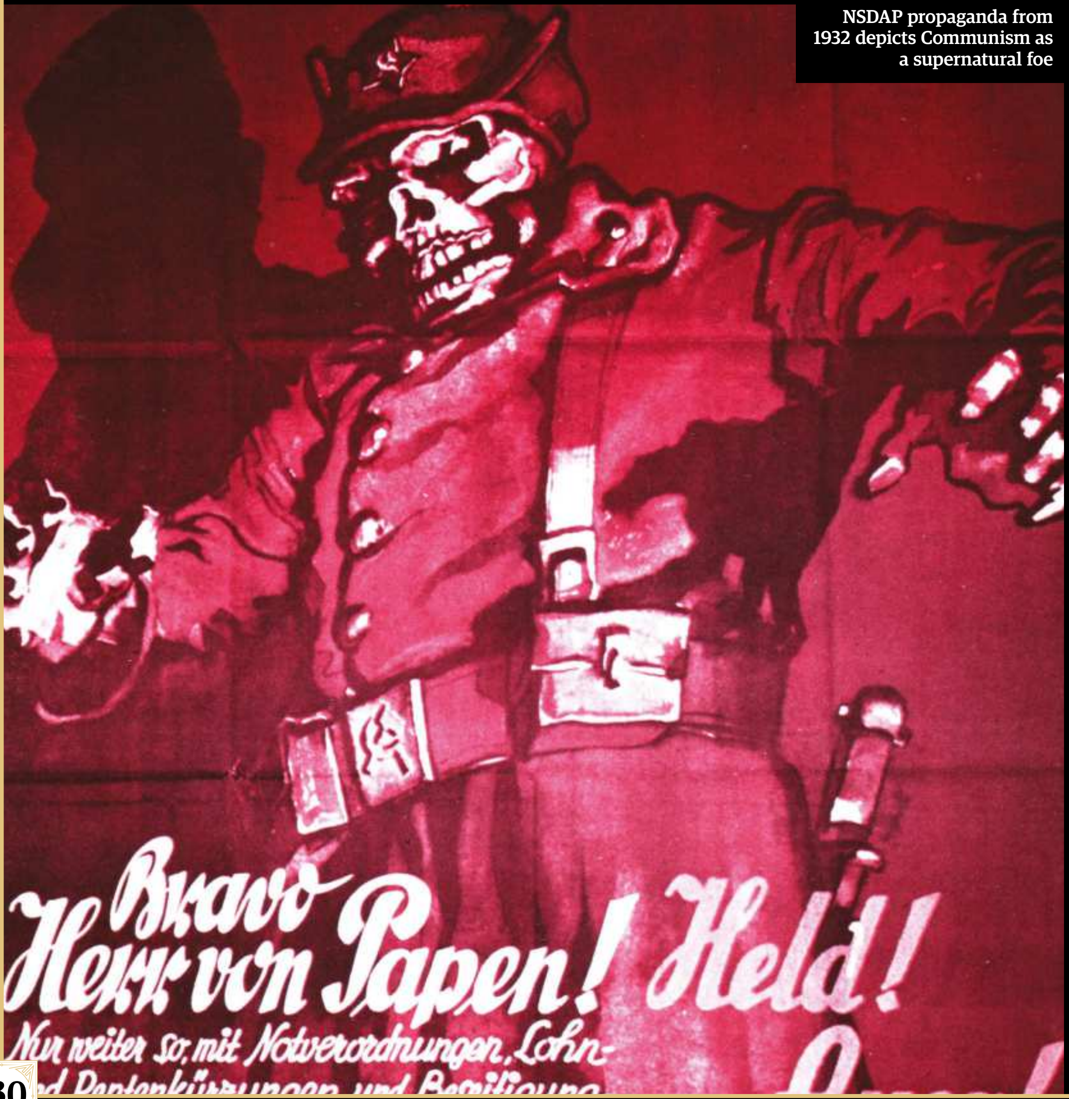
Across Europe and North America, the turn of the century represented the flowering of superstitious thought. This was the product of spiritual anxiety – people felt lost in this unstable new world and nowhere was this more obvious than in Germany.

Hot on the heels of their seemingly incomprehensible defeat in World War I came the economic mismanagement and political instability of the Weimar Republic, bringing with it running street battles between far left and far right, and hyperinflation – an unnecessary head start for the race to the bottom that was the Great Depression. What granted this febrile atmosphere a uniquely dangerous quality was the burgeoning relationship between nationalism, anti-Semitism and supernatural superstitions.

Still a new country with myriad dialects and regional identities, significant Slavic and Jewish minorities and a volatile confessional faultline between the Protestant north and the Catholic south, Germany had only become unified under one flag in 1871, while Austria remained part of the 'German world' but not a part of the country itself. In short, the question of what it was to be 'a German' hadn't really been resolved.

The soundtrack to this combative nationalism was undoubtedly Richard Wagner. In 1869, the first part of what would become his epic *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of Nibelungen*) was staged in Munich. Conceived as a break from the Italian-style operas of his earlier career, *Nibelungen* crafted a new shared mythology out of pre-Christian Norse and Germanic folktales. Although widely admired, amid these thunderous chords was plenty that the emerging German far right could embrace: a heroic masculine ideal overcoming duplicitous foes, spiritual purity versus greedy materialism, and sheer bloody righteousness.

> "To be German you had to be descended from this pre-industrial pagan idyll that their cherry-picking of history had contrived"


Bravo
Herr von Papen! Held!
Nur weiter so, mit Notverordnungen, Lohn-

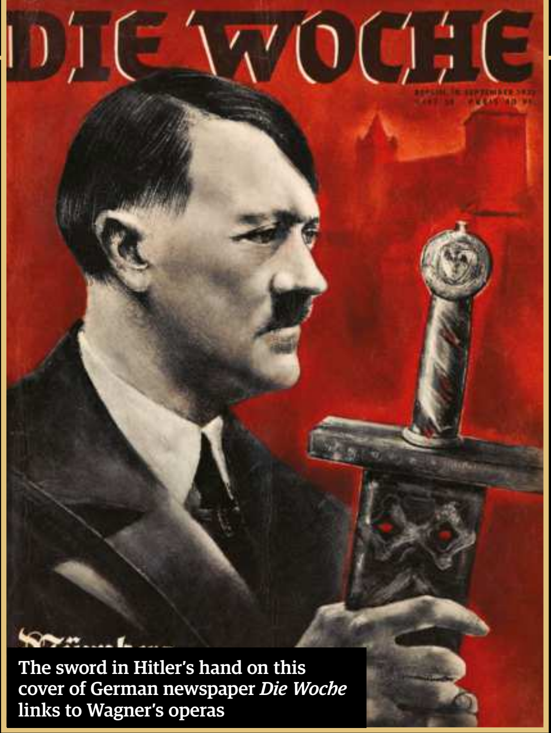
NSDAP propaganda from 1932 depicts Communism as a supernatural foe

Another spiritual bonding agent for this fractured nation was the völkisch movement that emerged over the 19th century, emphasising the spiritual purity of German peasant life and folklore that had become corrupted by urbanisation and Christianity. For völkisch thinkers, theirs was an exclusive creed: Blut und Boden (Blood and Soil). German soil and German blood were linked, and to be German you had to be descended from this pre-industrial pagan idyll that their cherry-picking of history had contrived.

In 1903, the hoary Austrian occultist Guido von List (and his acolyte Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels) popularised a new theory that bound this sense of longing and bubbling hatred into a potent new form: Ariosophy, or Armanism. An active contributor to völkisch journals on the subject of ancient runes (he created the 18-letter Armanen Futharkh later used by the SS) and his own Odin-worshipping cult, List believed that all the great figures in history and legend were Aryans whose golden age had been ended by the onset of inferior races and cultures.

List and Liebenfels identified Atlantis – an object of particular fascination for 19th-century occultists – with the mythical North Atlantic island civilisation of Thule, postulating that the ancient Aryans had been scattered from there following a catastrophic flood, with the purest bloodlines of this spiritual Aryan super race settling in Germany and the Himalayas.

Now German meant Aryan, and those of insufficient 'Aryan blood' – Jews and Slavs, for example – were seen as an existential threat to the völk. Purely by existing, völkisch fanatics believed that these 'lesser races' were poisoning the sacred union of their ancient culture and land. This broiling stew of heroic mythology that followed Wagner, the imagined pagan past and virulent racism of the völkisch movement, and myriad other occult fascinations that bloomed in this hothouse of unreason – from numerology and astrology to dowsing rods and homeopathy – were the engine that drove a significant chunk of the German right. Crucially, these strands of thought electrified many who would go on to take their place by Hitler's side following his seizure of power in 1933.



The sword in Hitler's hand on this cover of German newspaper *Die Woche* links to Wagner's operas

Blut und Boden

Many high-ranking members of the Nazi Party believed in the idea of Blut und Boden: 'Blood and Soil'

Blut und Boden called for rural values and the preserving of farming communities

A pagan shrine in Germany for those following the Norse gods

Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess and the notorious governor general of occupied Poland, Hans Frank, were both members of the Thule Society, which grew out of the obscure völkisch Germanenorden (German Order) and Reichshammerbund (Reich Hammer Association). Frustrated by their lack of electoral success, the Thule Society entrusted right-wing journalist Karl Harrer with the task of shearing their hateful creed of its occult tics and taking it to the working class. The result was the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (German Worker's Party), co-founded in 1919 by Harrer and Dietrich Eckart.

As the DAP transitioned to the NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or the National Socialist German Worker's Party) in 1920 under charismatic new frontman and Eckart protégé Adolf Hitler, they broke their links with the Thule Society and booted out Harrer, having drawn away members, support and even the official newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter* (*People's Observer*), from their one-time sponsors.

Minister of Food Richard Walther Darré, Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss, Hitlerjungend (Hitler Youth) leader Baldur von Schirach and Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler all met in the extreme völkisch Artaman League, which formed in 1923. The Artaman preached a retreat from cities and Christianity, and into farmsteads and solstice festivals. They looked to Eastern Europe for "German soil" to "reclaim" and violently opposed the Slavic presence in Germany's ethnically mixed eastern borderlands. Like the Thule Society, the League was soon swallowed up by the rise of NSDAP and by 1927, an estimated 80 per cent of their membership had joined Hitler.

While in the grand scheme of Weimar Germany's tempestuous political scene the likes of the Thule Society and the Artaman League were little more than racist social clubs for middle-class dilettantes, the NSDAP was a mass movement that spoke to the fears of the German working class. It promised jobs, stability, economic good times, victory over enemies within and without and a new world on their own terms. It may have been couched in the rhetoric of good versus evil, destiny and the völk – describing Jewish people in the terminology of the vampire and Hitler in the language of the saviour – but these were subordinate to political realities.

Hitler himself had very little contact with the occult fringes of the German far right and, indeed, esoteric sects began to be shut down from 1933 and the more outspoken activists – "völkisch wandering scholars", in Hitler's own words – were silenced.

For the Führer, the supernatural was a prop, a way of encapsulating and manipulating that desire for something better, stronger, more self-assured that many ordinary Germans felt at the time. He embraced the imagery of Wagner, seeing himself as his heroic protagonist Siegfried, and identified with the archetype of the 'magician' or the 'prophet' – but these were costumes to be worn on the political stage.

Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung best encapsulated the supernatural aura of Hitler's presentation, saying in 1942: "He is the loudspeaker which magnifies the inaudible whispers of the German soul until they can be heard by the German's conscious ear [...] Hitler's power is not political; it is magic."

Fortune tellers & the Third Reich

Nazi Germany never really settled on an official position when it came to astrology, and that started right at the top

The dream quest of Rudolf Hess

Pushed to the fringes of the Third Reich and anxious about the coming war with the Soviet Union, Hess set upon the idea of a desperate peace mission to Britain that would put him back in the Führer's good graces.

With his astrologer Ernst Schulte Strathaus having advised him of the optimum departure date for a mission of peace, on 10 May 1941 – just over a month before the start of Operation Barbarossa – Hess set off alone on a night flight to Scotland in his personal Messerchsmitt Bf 110. Crash landing and taken into custody, British intelligence quickly realised that not only were Hess' pleas for peace a cheque that couldn't be cashed, but the Deputy Führer himself wasn't entirely stable. Over the long incarceration that followed, Hess raged that his food was been poisoned, attempted suicide and admitted that the idea for his flight had come to him in a dream.

Back in Berlin, Hitler was furious. Egged on by Bormann and Rosenberg, who blamed the advice of astrologers for this betrayal, Hitler authorised the 'Hess Action'. On 9 June 1941, Heydrich began a mass round-up of astrologers, psychics and faith healers. Hundreds were arrested, thousands of occult books seized and Schulte Strathaus disappeared into a concentration camp for two years.

Much to the frustration of Rosenberg, Heydrich put the focus on re-education, a relatively benign response given the wanton terror that the Gestapo had visited on the other ideological enemies of the Reich. Many of those interned were eventually released. Either Heydrich had given up pushing against Himmler's indulgence of the supernatural, or, with the impending war in the east, he simply felt the resources of the Reich Main Security Office were better spent elsewhere.

RUDOLF HESS

Deputy Führer

(1933-41)

One of Hitler's most devoted early followers, Hess became increasingly marginalised and outmanoeuvred by more accomplished political big beasts, including his own secretary. The Deputy Führer allegedly used a pendulum to decided whether letters were sent by allies or enemies and regularly solicited advice from astrologers.

The most prolific patron of occultists in Nazi Germany, Himmler relied upon his personal astrologer Wilhelm Wulff so heavily towards the end of the war that Walter Schellenberg, chief of SD-Ausland (foreign intelligence), found it easier to seek orders from the "court magician" than the "king".

HEINRICH HIMMLER

Reichsführer-SS

(1929-45)

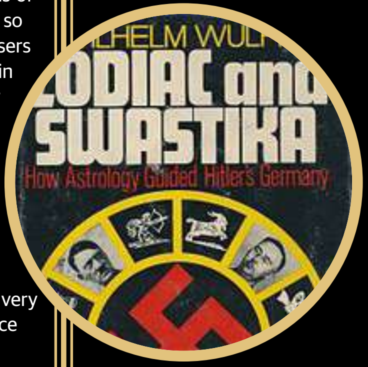
The stars are our secret weapon

With secret British innovations such as radar, sonar and Bletchley Park codebreaking turning the tables on the German U-boat menace in the Atlantic, the German Navy was at a loss to explain this reversal of fortunes. Inevitably, superstition flourished in ignorance and, at the suggestion of U-boat captain Hans Roeder, the MND (Marine Nachrichten Dienst; Naval Intelligence Service) authorised the establishment of the Pendulum Institute in Berlin.

Roeder's rogues gallery included the likes of Karl Krafft, briefly released from prison for the job, astrologer Wilhelm Wulff and dowser Ludwig Straniak. This was the first officially sanctioned use of authentic astrology in the Third Reich (Goebbels wasn't genuinely soliciting horoscopes, after all), but it wouldn't be the last. When the navy eventually lost patience in the Pendulum Institute, many of its beneficiaries found work with the SS. Wulff in particular would claim to be at the heart of an unlikely tale: Operation Mars.

By August 1943, Benito Mussolini had been overthrown and imprisoned by the Italian government, who were looking for an early exit from the war. Retrieving the deposed dictator was of paramount importance to keeping fascist Italy fighting and so Himmler ordered around 40 astrologers, diviners and dowsers to be released from concentration camps and put to work in a villa conjuring the defeated dictator's whereabouts. Their prize would be freedom plus a million Reichsmarks, but swapping the cruel camp regime for Himmler's luxurious pile was more than enough.

Eventually, though, Mussolini was located and retrieved in a daring mission led by the infamous Otto Skorzeny on 12 September 1943. Himmler was overjoyed with the tremendous success of Operation Mars and, although the intelligence gathering behind the successful operation was very much the traditional kind, nobody had it in them to convince him otherwise.


LHELM WUL
ODIAC and
SWASTIKA
How Astrology Guided Hitler's Germany

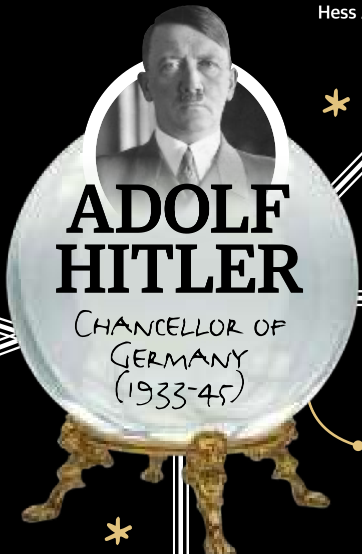
BELIEVERS

> "Goebbels began building a team of astrologers who could influence public opinion on his behalf"

MARTIN BORMANN

Secretary to the Deputy Führer (1932-41)
Chief of the Party Chancellery (1941-45)

Despite being subordinate to Hess on paper, Bormann managed everything from the Führer's personal finances to civil service appointments within the German government. He was an immensely influential political operator who controlled access to Hitler and had little patience for the occult. This antipathy to both astrology and his increasingly irrelevant boss led him to spur on the Hess Action of 1941.



ADOLF HITLER

Chancellor of Germany (1933-45)

Though sympathetic to the power of superstition to make or break a leader, Hitler claimed to have no interest in astrology. Speaking in July 1942, the Führer observed: "Although an oracle's prophecies may be wrong a hundred times (when they are promptly forgotten), it suffices for one prophecy to be fortuitously confirmed by subsequent events, for it to be believed, cherished and handed down from generation to generation."

JOSEPH GOEBBELS

Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (1933-45)

The pragmatic propaganda minister banned publishing horoscopes of prominent political figures outright and later banned public fortune telling, but he understood the value of astrology in shaping opinion. Ever the arch-cynic, Goebbels published anti-occultist literature on the one hand, but eventually recruited his own astrologers to churn out politically sanctioned prophecy on the other.

ALFRED ROSENBERG

Commissar for Supervision of Intellectual and Ideological Education of the NSDAP (1934-45)

Hitler's ideological Rottweiler, Rosenberg was responsible for the letter of Nazi doctrine in matters of culture. Although the depth of his occult interests rivalled Hess and Himmler, he had no tolerance for belief systems that countered the letter of National Socialist writ and regularly fought turf wars with Himmler.

REINHARD HEYDRICH

Director of the Gestapo (1934-39)
Director of the Reich Main Security Office (1939-42)

Heydrich was tasked with shutting down sects, mystics and fortune tellers who represented a threat to Nazi orthodoxy, a mission made more complex by Himmler, who encouraged him to police the arbitrary distinction between "scientific" and "fraudulent astrologers". Many of those pursued by the SD (Sicherheitsdienst, the intelligence wing of the SS) or Gestapo would find protection under Himmler or, from late 1939, Goebbels.

SCEPTICS

Predict for victory

Defying the ban on predictions involving the Reich leadership, the Swiss-born astrologer Karl Krafft sent an urgent letter to a friend with SS connections warning that Hitler's life was in danger between 7 and 10 November 1939. When the Führer narrowly escaped a bomb by minutes on 8 November, Krafft was hauled in by the Gestapo as a potential accomplice. Eventually they released him, convinced his apparent foreknowledge was nothing sinister.

Goebbels, though, was fascinated. Seeing that the British had begun broadcasting bogus horoscopes to erode the confidence of the German public, Goebbels began building a team of astrologers who could influence public opinion on his behalf. Krafft took centre stage as work began on pamphlets based around reinterpreting the 16th-century prophecies of Nostradamus to trumpet a preordained German victory and spread them across Europe.

Goebbels was delighted, writing triumphantly of the fatalism that his work was inspiring in France, but Krafft's self-respect was bruised. He grew increasingly belligerent and was unwilling to toe the line and compromise on his craft, as he saw it. He resigned, although his work continued to be printed regardless of his wishes, and Goebbels' team of tame astrologers produced hundreds of books, pamphlets and radio broadcasts until 1943, falsely convinced that the British public were as enthralled by astrology as their German counterparts.

Out from under the protection of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, Krafft fell firmly back under the crosshairs of the Gestapo and, unable to keep his mouth shut about the Third Reich's chances as the stars relayed them to him, he was picked up in the Hess Action. In and out of prison and concentration camps for the rest of the war, Krafft eventually died of typhus on 8 January 1945 while in a boxcar to Buchenwald.

The dark culture of the SS

Himmler's state-within-a-state was filled with outlandish occultists and projects

Heinrich Himmler's political upbringing in the esoteric Artaman League permeated his many endeavours. Once he was handed control of the Schutzstaffel (Protection Squad) responsible for the security of the party's elite in 1929, he set about transforming the SS from bloody-knuckled, Weimar-era street brawlers into a militant order inspired by the Teutonic Knights who brought Germanic sword and fire to the dark forests and mountains of the Baltic.

While most of Himmler's occult predilections initially played out behind closed doors, in one way at least it was worn on his sleeve. SS insignia, from the infamous double lightning flash to the emblems of various units and formations, came from Guido von List's runic alphabet.

As wider German society became steadily hostile to the more maverick mystics, Himmler welcomed them with open arms and set them to work. The Ahnenerbe – more properly the Forschungsund Lehrgemeinshaft das Ahnenerbe (Ancestral Research and Teaching Society) – was formed under a different name in 1935, before being gradually absorbed into the SS.

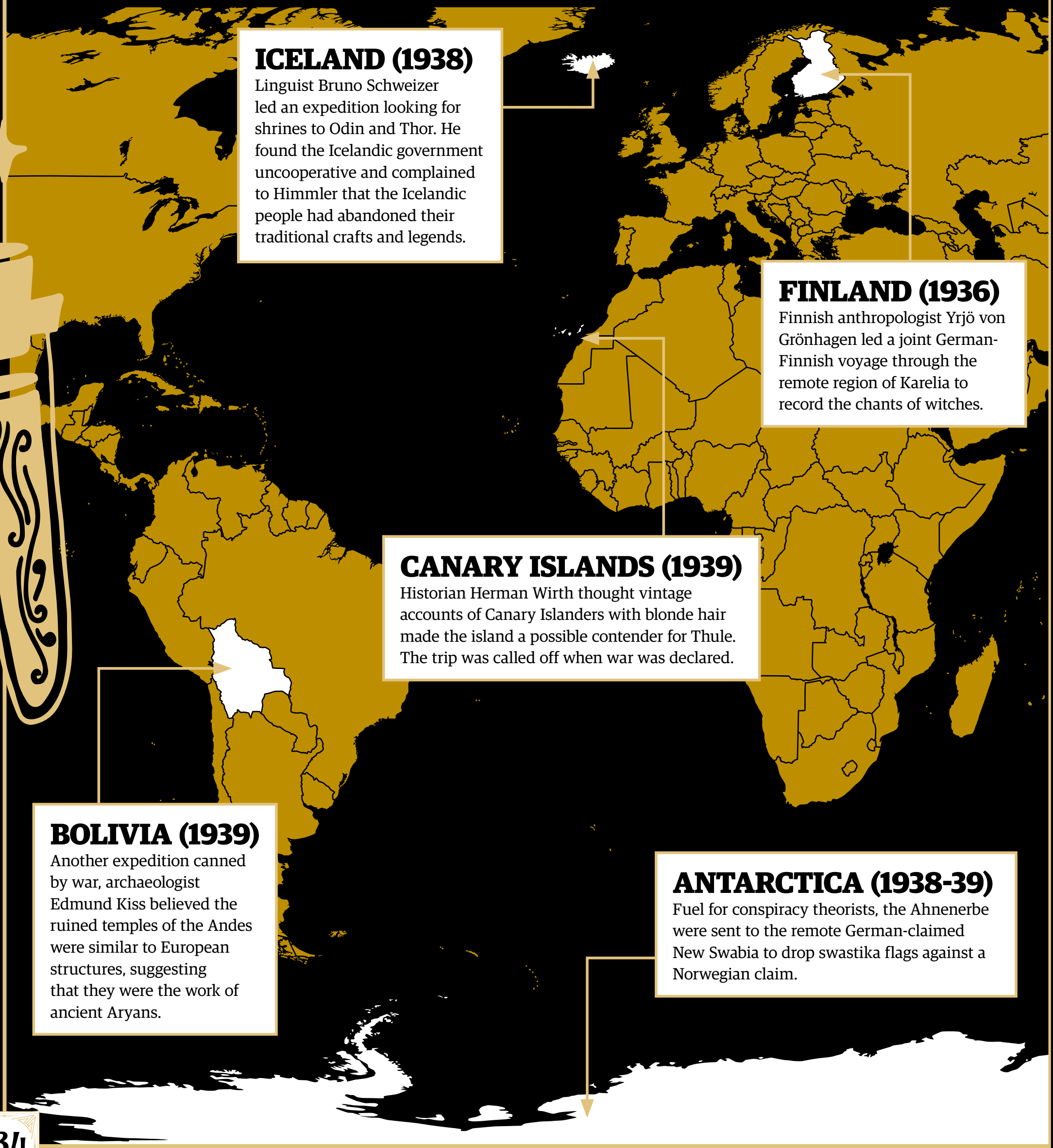
Concerned with research into the mythic origins of Aryans and recovering or recreating their knowledge, the Ahnenerbe ballooned into a vast apparatus with departments covering research areas as niche as Hausmarken und Sippenzeichen (House Brands and Family Marks), Wurtenforschung (Dwelling Mound Research), Indogermanische Rechtsgeschichte (Indogermanic Historical jurisprudence) and Volkserzählung, Märchen und Sagenkunde (Folktales, Fairytales and Myths). Unsurprisingly, its manager Wolfram Sievers was a veteran of the Artaman League.

Perhaps its most sensationalist endeavour, though, was the 1938-39 expedition to Tibet. A fact-finding trip into the spurious shared heritage of the other 'pure' Aryan culture to have survived the catastrophic sinking of Atlantis/Thule, its leader, the square-jawed Bear Grylls of Nazi Germany Ernst Schäfer, consulted Himmler's mystic mentor Karl Maria Wiligut before his departure. He left convinced that Wiligut had read his mind using techniques only known to the Tibetan lamas.

The expedition was a masterpiece in confirmation bias as Schäfer's team – who held a

Join the Ahnenerbe, see the world!

They didn't just go to Tibet, they travelled the globe in the name of ancestral research



ICELAND (1938)
Linguist Bruno Schweizer led an expedition looking for shrines to Odin and Thor. He found the Icelandic government uncooperative and complained to Himmler that the Icelandic people had abandoned their traditional crafts and legends.

FINLAND (1936)
Finnish anthropologist Yrjö von Grönhagen led a joint German-Finnish voyage through the remote region of Karelia to record the chants of witches.

CANARY ISLANDS (1939)
Historian Herman Wirth thought vintage accounts of Canary Islanders with blonde hair made the island a possible contender for Thule. The trip was called off when war was declared.

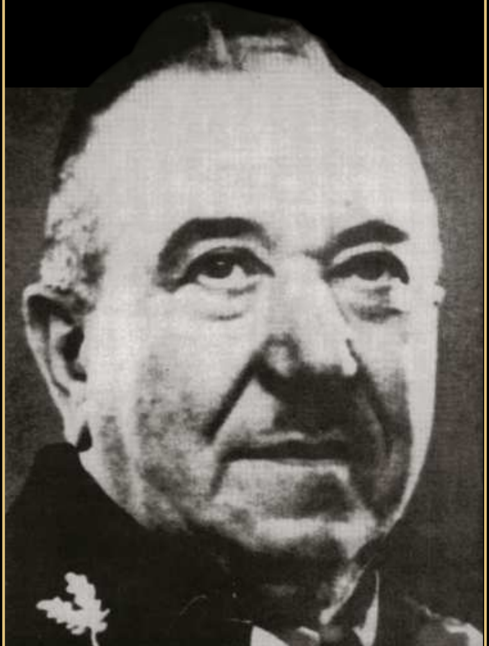
BOLIVIA (1939)
Another expedition canned by war, archaeologist Edmund Kiss believed the ruined temples of the Andes were similar to European structures, suggesting that they were the work of ancient Aryans.

ANTARCTICA (1938-39)
Fuel for conspiracy theorists, the Ahnenerbe were sent to the remote German-claimed New Swabia to drop swastika flags against a Norwegian claim.

The Rasputin of the Reich

By Himmler's side from late 1933 to his retirement in summer 1939 aged 72 was Karl Maria Wiligut. A one-time Austrian asylum patient, although the SS kept records of his mental health tightly under wraps lest they expose their boss to ridicule, Wiligut claimed direct descent from a line of prehistoric German sages created by a coupling of Asen (air) and Wanen (water) gods – the Aesir and Vanir in Norse mythology.

Along with the ancient rites he had inherited from his father and his father's father, Wiligut boasted of a "clairvoyant memory" that allowed him to channel ancestral wisdom. In one particularly lurid incident, he was driving with Himmler when suddenly he began to fit. Foaming at the mouth, he lurched from the car and into a nearby field. Lucid again, Wiligut announced that this was a site sacred to the ancient Germans.



Otto Rahn
Luzifers Hofgesind
Eine Reise zu den guten Geistern Europas

Raider of the lost grail

A passionate historian of Medieval grail lore often referred to as the "real Indiana Jones", Otto Rahn was lured into the SS inner circle by Wiligut on the strength of his widely read 1933 book *Kreuzzug gegen den Gral* (*Crusade Towards the Grail*), which spread the idea that the 13th-century Cathar heresy was in fact the remnants of a Germanic pagan cult.

Rahn was particularly taken with accounts of three Cathar knights slipping over the walls of the doomed Montsegur Castle with the Holy Grail – the cup used to catch the blood of Christ at his crucifixion, believed by Rahn to be a pre-Christian relic that fell from the sky – hidden in a sack and travelled to the Languedoc region of southern France to explore the subterranean passages used by the Cathars.

Himmler loved Rahn's work so much he committed it to memory and signed off a 1,000-Reichsmark a month stipend for Rahn to work on his next book. Rahn took on SS rank and uniform to better ingratiate himself with his new patrons. As an openly gay man he should have been on his guard, but his obsession with finding the Holy Grail blinded him to all else. Only when his 'sequel' *Luzifers Hofgesind* (*Lucifer's Court*) appeared in 1937 with anti-Semitic passages crudely inserted by another hand, did Rahn perhaps realise the monster that his efforts were feeding. Himmler, for his part, was delighted with *Lucifer's Court*, which linked the Cathar heresy to wider witchcraft cults through the figure of Lucifer – the Devil – here a pagan bringer of light demonised by the Christian Church, and ordered 5,000 copies bound in leather to be presented to the Nazi elite. Hitler was even given one for his birthday.

Punished for a drunken scrape with a three-month tour of duty on the staff of Dachau concentration camp, Rahn was horrified by what he saw and naïvely tried to resign his commission. Rumours of his sexuality and possible Jewish heritage were beginning to make the rounds.

While stories vary on the exact chain of events, some say his resignation was refused and a solution that better suited the Reichsführer-SS was proposed. Either way, in March 1939, 34-year-old Rahn climbed a snow-covered slope in Austria's Tyrol mountains and was found dead the following morning, his lifeless eyes staring out across the serene landscape.

winter solstice rite when they arrived – returned laden down with artefacts and holy books, convinced of the shared Aryan heritage of National Socialism and the Tibetan Buddhism.

So pleased was Himmler with the scope and scale of his organisation's output that he presented Hitler with a set of leather-bound volumes recording the great Ahnenerbe discoveries on his 50th birthday.

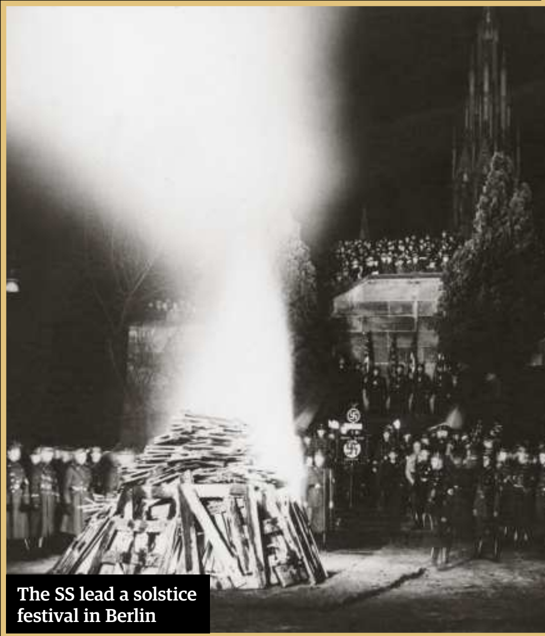
Despite the all-consuming growth of Ahnenerbe, Himmler's voracious hunger for occultish knowledge also led to the eye-catching Hexen-Sonderauftrag (Special Assignment – Witches), or H-Sonderkommando (H-Special unit), which ultimately found itself concerned with cataloguing lore and artefacts relating to witch trials and hunts.

They managed to fill a detailed library of reference cards – the Hexenkartothek – with accounts of lusty Germanic pagans facing off against the feeble-minded Church. Despite having some overlapping areas of interest, they avoided being absorbed by the Ahnernerbe by 'discovering' that Himmler was a direct descendent of Margareth Himbler, a woman who was burnt alive as a witch in 1629.

It's important to remember that this seemingly ridiculous obsession with chronicling an imagined past of magical rituals and storybook heroes was part of an ideology of unrivalled venom and intent. Himmler's genocidal campaign in the wake of Operation Barbarossa – cleansing the east of Jews, Roma and Sinti, communists and a bloody swathe of the Slavic population in preparation for German colonists – was a dark dream drawn from his days in the Artaman League. As custodians of Aryan superiority whose work fed the ideological engine that drove the Holocaust, the Ahnenerbe found themselves on the frontline.

Archaeologist Hans Schleif was given custody of Ahnenerbe's activities in occupied Poland, plundering Polish treasures from the Warsaw Archaeological Museum and looting Jewish homes in the country. The anthropologist from the Tibet expedition, Bruno Beger, procured skeletons for racial categorisation, selecting an estimated 100 prisoners from concentration camps for murder and study. Finally, folklorist Alfred Karasek took control of the resettlement of Germans in Ukraine and ultimately became an active participant in mass murder and population clearance.

> "As custodians of Aryan superiority whose work fed the ideological engine that drove the Holocaust, the Ahnenerbe found themselves on the frontline"


The SS lead a solstice festival in Berlin

Ernst Schäfer during the Tibetan expedition

Himmler's Nazi Camelot

Inside Wewelsberg castle, the SS's monument to mysticism

With the SS increasingly retreating into a world of its own, distinct even from the collective madness of the Third Reich, Himmler hit upon the 17th-century Wewelsburg Castle in Westphalia as the perfect inner sanctum for his unholy order.

The castle was soon appropriated for the ideological indoctrination of the SS Race and Settlement Office in 1934 under the esoteric influence of Wiligut Himmler. He began to envisage it as a tribute to Henry the Fowler, a 10th-century German ruler reimagined by Wagner in his opera *Lohengrin* as the first great pan-Germanic hero, uniting the nation against the Hungarians. Himmler believed himself to be the reincarnation of Henry.

While Himmler's lieutenants held pseudo-pagan rites, celebrating weddings and solstices alike in an imagined Germanic tradition, millions of Reichsmarks were sunk into renovating the castle. A concentration camp was opened nearby to provide a labour force and the Ahnenerbe became glorified interior designers as rooms were named after great German rulers and filled with related artwork, artefacts and armour, stolen and bought.

The castle's two showstopping features were testament to Himmler's mythic pretensions: a pseudo-Arthurian round table for the SS elite and a vast hall, the floor adorned with a jagged 'black sun' that glorified in the deeds of dead SS-Gruppenführer (SS-group leaders), who would be ritualistically cremated and stored in one of seven urns in the vault below.

Similarly, the personalised SS-Ehrenring (SS-honour rings, also called Totenkopfring, or 'death's head rings'), designed to signal membership of the inner circle of Himmler's order, were returned here for storage upon the owner's death, creating an eternal brotherhood linked in death as they were in life by the twisted ideals of the genocidal Schutzstaffel.

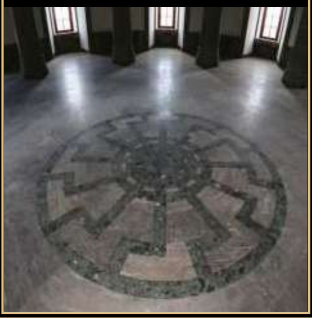
Plans compiled across 1940 and 1942, set aside as the tide of war turned against the Third Reich, provide for the entire relocation of the nearby village and a vast complex spilling out over a kilometre on a wheel of towers and curtain walls.

In 1945, as the US Army advanced, Himmler ordered Wewelsburg to be razed rather than see his sacred temple profaned. In the end, it was only partly destroyed but damaged enough to inspire mystery and invite questions that cannot be easily answered. Wewelsburg became a subject of fascination in the 1970s, a Nazi 'Camelot' of occult mysteries and secretive rituals.

> "Millions of Reichsmarks were sunk into renovating and redecorating the castle"

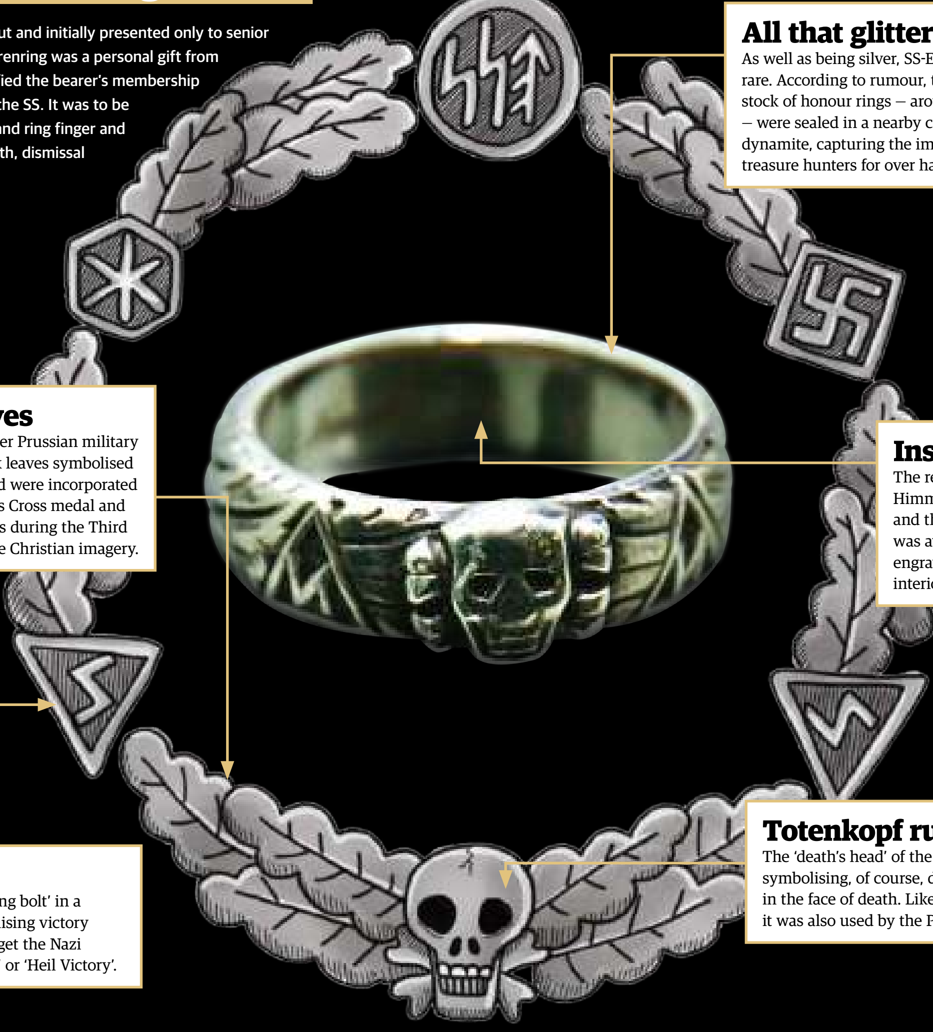
The Black Sun

Now nearly as potent in its toxicity as the swastika, the black sun wasn't widely used by the Third Reich, appearing only on the floor of Wewelsburg's 'hall of heroes'. Composed of a sunwheel – one of the traditional symbols of Germanic paganism – and 12 single sig runes radiating outwards, the black sun was an astrological body whose power, according to Himmler's occult mentor, Karl Maria Wiligut, could be harnessed through yoga.



Honour among thieves

Designed by Willigut and initially presented only to senior officers, the SS-Ehrenring was a personal gift from Himmler and signified the bearer's membership of an 'elite' within the SS. It was to be worn on the left hand ring finger and returned upon death, dismissal or retirement.



All that glitters
As well as being silver, SS-Ehrenring are rare. According to rumour, the castle's stock of honour rings – around 9,280 – were sealed in a nearby cave with dynamite, capturing the imagination of treasure hunters for over half a century.

Oak leaves
A feature on older Prussian military decorations, oak leaves symbolised regeneration and were incorporated into the Knight's Cross medal and onto gravestones during the Third Reich to displace Christian imagery.

Inscription
The recipient's name, Himmler's signature and the date it was awarded were engraved on the interior of the ring.

Sig rune
A single 'lightning bolt' in a triangle, symbolising victory from which we get the Nazi salute 'Sieg Heil' or 'Heil Victory'.

Totenkopf rune
The 'death's head' of the SS, symbolising, of course, death or valour in the face of death. Like the oak leaves, it was also used by the Prussian army.

Weird War II

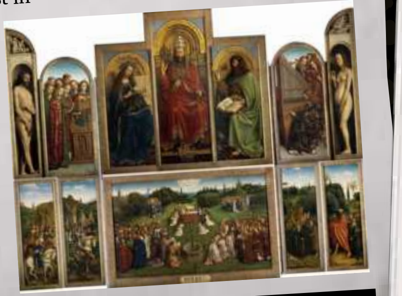
Some of the most headline-grabbing projects attributed to the Nazis are simply nonsense

SECRET MAP TO THE GRAIL SEIZED

Hitler's henchmen loot the Ghent Altarpiece

Hubert and Jan van Eyck's 15th-century *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, often referred to as the Ghent Altarpiece for its pride of place at Ghent Cathedral, is one of the most important pieces of Christian artwork in Europe and Hitler *had* to have it. One key panel shows a lamb bleeding into the Holy Grail, signifying the elaborate polyptych's true role – a secret map to the sacred vessel.

Hitler's interest in the Ghent Altarpiece was political as well as artistic. Aside from being a work he hugely admired, it was one of the artworks returned to Belgium in the Treaty of Versailles and he felt it rightfully belonged to the Reich.



World News

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THE DEVIL INSIDE DER FÜHRER

Adolf Hitler's evil inspired by demonic possession

Surely acts that murderous could only come from Lucifer himself? Former far-right politician Hermann Rauschning's 1939 biography of the Führer paints a troubling portrait of a man plagued by demonic voices. Hitler himself underlined "He who does not have the demonic seed within himself will never give birth to a magical world" in his personal copy of Ernst Schertel's *Magic: History, Theory and Practice.*

Rauschning embellished his contact with Hitler considerably, publishing his book to meet the growing interest in Germany's new master. As for the "demon seed", Hitler's enthusiasm for Schertel was purely symbolic – a magician was someone who changed the world through sheer force of will.

UNHOLY HITLER WIELDS HOLY LANCE

It pierced the side of Christ and led Adolf to victory

The fabled Spear of Longinus, reputed to have pierced the side of Christ at the Crucifixion, was seized from Vienna's treasury by the Nazis during the Anschluss. Hitler used its otherworldly powers, harnessed by the great German warrior kings of the past, to steamroller most of Europe.

The story surfaced in a 1972 book by Trevor Ravenscroft, who claimed to have studied under Austrian occultist and Grail writer Walter Stein. It later transpired the two had never met and Ravenscroft contacted Stein after his death in a seance. Meanwhile, Vienna's Hofsburg Spear dates from the 7th century CE – well after its cameo in the New Testament.

MAGICIAN MENTORS A MONSTER

Aleister Crowley fed the Führer hallucinogens and taught him everything he knew

Crowley's magical manifesto *The Book of the Law* was translated into German in 1925, catching the eye of Adolf Hitler. Translator Martha Küntzel observed the similarities between the text and Hitler's own declaration of dark faith, *Mein Kampf*. Crowley tried to contact Hitler around 1930 to induct him into Thelema and he annotated a copy of Küntzel's 1939 book *Hitler Speaks* with the commonalities.

In reality, this bromance was all rather one-sided. There's no evidence that Hitler was aware of Crowley's writings, and by the time *The Book of the Law* was released in Germany, the future Führer's worldview was firmly established.

© Alamy, Getty

Gardner's Genesis of Wicca

Utilising ancient and recent writings and commentary, Gerald Gardner brought Wicca into modern religious discourse during the mid-20th century and became its first media star

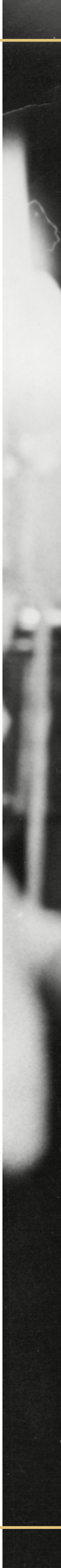
Written by Mike Haskew

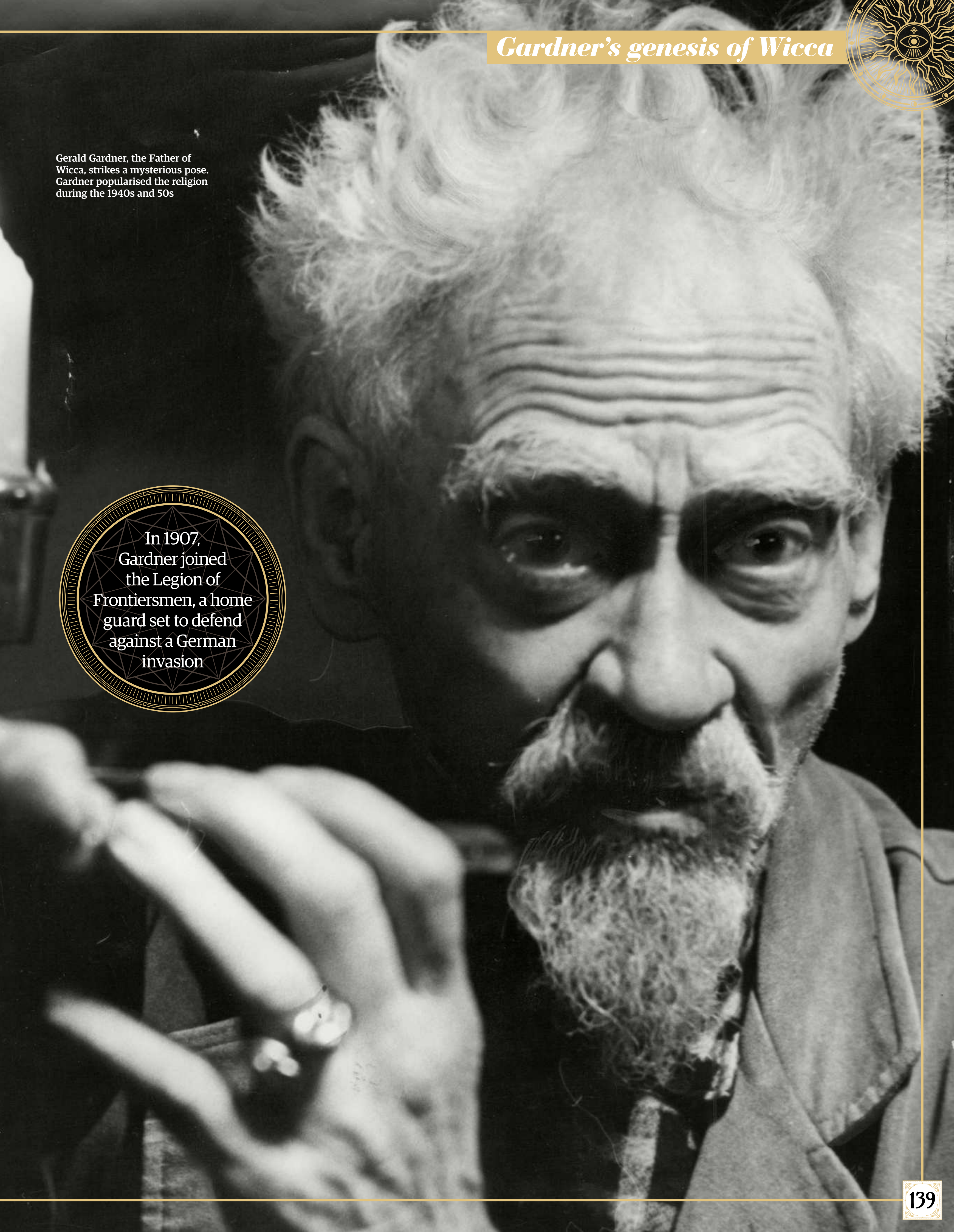
Modern Wicca traces its origins to the early 20th century and the desire of individuals drawn to mysticism and occultism who sought a connection to the religions of the ancient world, particularly those of northern and western Europe.

While debate as to the religion's true origin continues, modern Wicca was popularised during the 1940s and 50s particularly in the writings and teachings of Gerald Gardner, a former British civil servant and adventurer who travelled widely during his lifetime. He was drawn into the exploration of pagan religions of Asia and Africa while studying the ways of the Druids and other practitioners. Wicca today includes followers who gather in covens, generally of up to 15 members, who practise witchcraft and the worship of nature. They revere the female deity, or goddess, and other associated deities.

Wiccans generally see their religion as based in pre-Christian tradition, while it also includes elements of numerous ancient religions, drawn from many pre-existing traditions and interspersed with the esoteric writings of ancient and modern mystics. The religion includes ceremonial magic, tenets of Freemasonry, spiritualism, theosophy, and the religion of Thelema and its founder, the mystic Aleister Crowley. The foremost proponent of modern Wicca, indeed the 'Father of Wicca,' Gardner popularised the religion in the mid-20th century, particularly with the release of his *Book of Shadows*, a collection of the writings, spells and traditions of others brought together with some of Gardner's own thoughts and interpretations.

Gardner's journey through the world of mysticism was lifelong. Born in Blundellsands, Lancashire, England on 13 June 1884 to a wealthy family engaged in the timber trade, he grew up in the influence of his Irish nursemaid, Josephine 'Com' McCombie, and saw much more of her during his formative years than his own parents. He was a sickly boy, and his family financed moves with Com to the French Riviera, the Canary Islands, and the coast of Africa. Along the way, he developed a fascination with armaments that also lasted his entire life.





Gerald Gardner, the Father of Wicca, strikes a mysterious pose. Gardner popularised the religion during the 1940s and 50s

In 1907, Gardner joined the Legion of Frontiersmen, a home guard set to defend against a German invasion

The festival of Samhain, All Hallows' Eve, is celebrated in Glastonbury as pagans gather to mark the night of the dead

Gardner spent nine years in Madeira, a Portuguese island colony, and rarely returned to England. Since he was abroad for much of his youth, Gardner never attended formal schools and essentially taught himself to read and write. After Com married David Elkington, owner of a tea plantation in Ceylon (Sri Lanka today), Gardner moved with the couple and learned the rudiments of running the enterprise. He became fascinated with the Buddhist beliefs of the local Singhalese people. Returning to England in 1907, he gravitated toward a family of relatives, the Sergenesons, who were interested in fantasy and mysticism. They often described experiences such as seeing fairies. Gardner claimed also that these family members introduced him to the story that his own grandfather was a practising witch. He often told a story that the family believed an ancestor had been burned at the stake as a witch in Newburgh in 1610.

Gardner returned to Ceylon late in 1907 to participate in the administration of a rubber plantation that his father had invested in. He became interested in Freemasonry and joined the lodge in the capital city of Colombo, but within four years the rubber enterprise had failed. His father sold the real estate, and Gardner wandered to Borneo. Considering himself an amateur anthropologist and archaeologist, he associated with the native Dusun and Dyak peoples on the Asian island. He was enthralled by their social customs, and particularly their religious practices, reportedly participating in native rituals. During this period he contracted malaria and moved on to Singapore.

Gardner participated in archaeological digs in Egypt and became a fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute in the 1930s

While working on a rubber plantation, Gardner was befriended by an American Muslim named Cornwall, who introduced him to the tenets of that faith. While amassing real estate that totalled hundreds of acres, Gardner made the confession of the Islamic faith but never became a practising Muslim himself. Soon after the outbreak of World War I, he joined the Malay States Volunteer Rifles, but later concluded that he could help the war effort more significantly by returning to England. He arrived in 1916, attempted to enlist in the Royal Navy, but was denied due to health issues. He volunteered to work in a hospital outside Liverpool and experienced the horrors of combat-wounded soldiers while working as an orderly. A recurrence of his malaria prompted a return to Malaya that autumn, and he worked for the local government as an inspector of rubber commerce, probably amassing some wealth as he took bribes to ignore a brisk black market trade in opium.

For Gardner a turning point in his life of spiritualism occurred in 1927 as his father suffered from dementia, prompting a return to England. Visiting spiritual mediums and attending séances and other rituals, he believed that spirits of deceased family members were quite active. An encounter with

The Pagan Sabbats

Wiccans and other pagans celebrate eight major holidays, or Sabbats, during a calendar year. These holy days make up the wheel of the year and are based on ancient pagan holy days marking the Earth's movement around the Sun and the change of seasons. Some Wiccans celebrate only the four cross-quarter days, Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh and Samhain, while others will celebrate all eight holy days, including Yule, Ostara, Midsummer and Mabon.

Imbolc, or St. Brigid's Day, the first holy day of the year, is observed on 1 and 2 February. Marking early spring, Imbolc recognises emergence from winter and lauds St. Brigid as a goddess. Ostara, the spring equinox, is observed around 21 March, commemorating the arrival of spring after the long winter. Beltane, also known as May Day, is celebrated on 1 May. Beltane is a celebration of fertility and procreation.

Midsummer is celebrated on 21 June, the summer solstice and longest day of the year. Wiccans observe the union of Heaven, Earth and Sun, while stressing healing magic and energy. Lughnasadh, also called Lammas, is celebrated on 1 August, marking the first of three harvest events. Mabon, the autumn equinox, is observed on 21 September, marking the second harvest festival as the season changes from summer to autumn.

Samhain, All Hallows' Eve, is celebrated on 31 October, marking the pagan new year, the night of the dead. Yule is celebrated between 20-22 December to mark the winter solstice, the longest night of the year. The observance symbolises the return of the Sun to rule the sky.

> "Gardner believed that spirits of deceased family members were quite active"

Gerald Gardner once owned and operated the Museum of Witchcraft located in Boscastle, Cornwall, United Kingdom

the spirit of a dead cousin profoundly affected his perspective on mysticism, and from that time he devoted much of his academic interests to the ideas of spiritualism and an afterlife.

A whirlwind courtship and marriage took place that summer when he met Dorothea Frances 'Donna' Rosedale. He proposed the next day, and two weeks later, on 16 August, the couple married. Soon they returned to Malaya, and Gardner renewed his association with Freemasonry while working on archaeological digs and becoming more involved with folklore, mysticism and anthropology. During the 1930s he travelled further, spending time in Egypt, where he was introduced to the cult of the Mother Goddess. He lectured and wrote a book on weaponry and travelled throughout Asia, returning to England at the insistence of his wife after his father's death in 1935.

Even after returning to Europe, the wanderlust continued, and Gardner travelled to the Middle East, becoming taken with the pagan goddess Ashtoreth and studying the deities of other ancient religions of the region, including Judaism. Plagued by chronic poor health, he was referred to a doctor who suggested that nudism might improve his physical fitness. As a member of a club in north London, he is thought to have met several influential people, one of whom introduced him to a contemporary pagan religion called Dionysianism. While traveling in the Mediterranean and living for months on the island of Cyprus, he wrote the novel *A Goddess Arrives*. After returning to England, he helped dig air raid trenches in London and volunteered as an air raid warden as World War II erupted in 1939.

Relocating temporarily to Highcliffe to escape incessant German bombing of London, Gardner became involved with the Rosicrucian Order Crotona Fellowship, whose founder Alexander Sullivan claimed to be the reincarnation of numerous historical figures, including Pythagoras and Francis Bacon. While questioning many of the group's beliefs and practices, Gardner became particularly fond of several of its members. In September 1939 he was taken to an old house, required to remove his clothing, and guided through some sort of initiation ceremony during which he heard the word 'wica' and recognised it as Old English for 'witch'.

He later asserted that this group constituted the New Forest coven. He became interested in Druidry, a religious movement that stresses harmony amongst all things in the natural world, and joined the Ancient Druid Order, a fraternal organisation that initiated its members. He frequented its ceremonies and rites such as its Midsummer ritual at the ancient Stonehenge site. At the same time, he joined the Folk-Lore Society and the Society for Physical Research, while speaking on various topics.

In the spring of 1947, Gardner met Aleister Crowley, who had founded the religion of

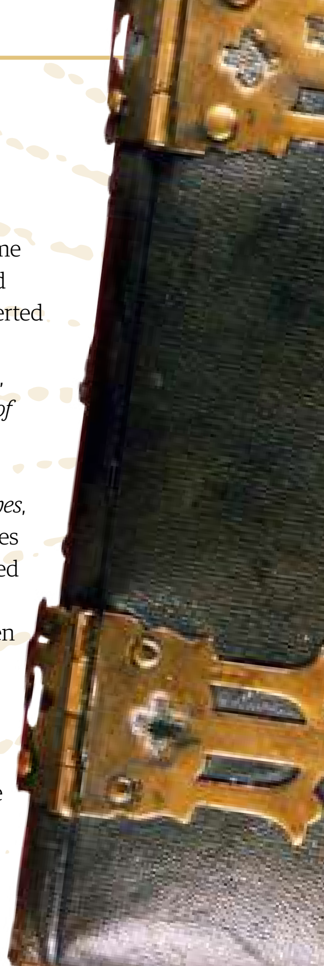
> In a 1951 magazine interview, Gardner asserted, "Of course I'm a witch. And I get great fun out of it."

The Book Of Shadows

The 'Book of Shadows' is an ancient term that originally related to the body of spells, incantations and ritual information belonging to an individual witch. Upon that witch's death, their personal book was traditionally destroyed. However, Gerald Gardner, the father of modern Wicca, used the title as a vehicle for a collection of such spells and ritual material in combination with his own writings and observations when he published *Book of Shadows* during the late 1940s or early 1950s. Gardner promoted his *Book of Shadows* as containing early spells and incantations that were rooted in ancient texts. Further analysis revealed that much of its content was taken from the Renaissance grimoire text called the *Key of Solomon* along with other writings.

Doreen Valiente, the one-time high priestess of the Bricket Wood coven, later made extensive revisions to Gardner's *Book of Shadows* when serious questions as to its authorship and content emerged. Some observers have speculated that the concept of the *Book of Shadows*, as Gardner promoted it, was his own invention. Valiente said that the idea came to him after viewing a magazine ad in 1949, and she was among the first to question his assertions. He reportedly responded to her inquiry by saying, "Well, if you think you can do better, go ahead."

Gerald Gardner popularised modern Wicca with the publication of his *Book of Shadows* in the mid-20th century



Doreen Valiente became a close associate of Gerald Gardner and high priestess of the Bricket Wood coven

> One of Gardner's high priestesses initially sold many of his possessions to Ripley's Believe It or Not! after his death

Thelema in 1904. Their association grew, and Gardner was elevated to high status in the Ordo Templi Orientis, a fraternal order in which Crowley was an influential member. Crowley died in 1947, and Gardner learned of this while travelling around the United States. For a while he led the Ordo Templi Orientis in Europe, but soon moved on to his most significant investment of time and effort.

Throughout his formative years, Gardner had become more familiar with Wicca, which probably came into existence in rudimentary form in the 1920s, borrowing both from ancient witchcraft and contemporary ideas. He came to the conclusion that Wicca was the surviving remnant of a witch cult that predated Christianity as explained in the writings of author Margaret Murray. Gardner began to advocate the practice of Wicca, including some of its rituals, in his fictional work, *High Magic's Aid*, as he sought to revive the religion. He utilised the *Key of Solomon*, a Renaissance grimoire text, as a basis for much of his work, and began to put together his own Wicca volume of relevant information, known as *Ye Bok of Ye Art Magical*. Numerous Wiccan spells and incantations were written in the book, and Gardner later said that it was the basis for his *Book of Shadows*, a text that helped to popularise Wicca in the mid-20th century.

Gardner had travelled frequently to London and visited a nudist club called Spielplatz, and his interest in Druidry had increased. He purchased land near the town of Bricket Wood and became active in another nudist enclave nearby. He later purchased an old building, deemed a 'witch's cabin', from a friend and brought it to Bricket Wood, where he held a sort of pagan ritual possibly based on ceremonial magic, founding the Bricket Wood coven during the 1940s. Its first members came from the nearby nudist colony.

Although the phrase 'Book of Shadows' has long been descriptive of a witch's personal volume that contains their own spells and rituals, Gardner explained that his book contained ancient information given to him as a member of the New Forest coven along with some of his own observations and contributions. While he asserted that much of the book was rooted in ancient witchcraft, a great portion of the *Book of Shadows* is believed to have originated with the *Key of Solomon*, the *Gospel of Witches*, which was written by Charles Godfrey Leland and belonged to an Italian coven, and the writings of Crowley and even poet Rudyard Kipling.

While observing the Midsummer ritual in 1953, Gardner initiated Doreen Valiente into Wicca, and she later became high priestess of the Bricket Wood coven. She assisted Gardner in the preparation of the *Book of Shadows* for publication and later made significant alterations to it after much of its content was deemed to have been lifted from other works. Nevertheless, Gardner had asserted that earlier witches had refrained from recording their rituals and incantations for fear of persecution. Later, however, as they began to do so, the *Book of Shadows* had become a significant text, raising the profile of Wicca in popular culture and subsequently attracting a growing number of followers during the 1950s and 60s.

Defining moment

The family practitioners

Early 1907

Although his Anglican family has had little to do with their relatives, the Sergenesons, because the latter are Methodists, Gerald becomes enamoured with them as they are willing to discuss the paranormal with him and relate tales of such occurrences in their lives. From the Sergenesons Gardner learns an old story that his grandfather had actually been a witch and hears that one of his ancestors had been tried and found guilty of witchcraft in the early 1600s. That relative was burned for the crime. The time Gardner spends with these relatives fuels a growing interest in the occult, leading to further discoveries.

Timeline

1884

Gardner is born
On this date, Friday the 13th, Gerald Gardner is born into a wealthy family in Blundellsands, Lancashire, England. His father, William, and mother, Maria, have five sons and three daughters.
13 June 1884

1888

Travels abroad begin
Gerald's ill health at age four prompts his nursemaid, Josephine 'Com' McCombie, to offer to take the boy abroad. Travels to France, the Canary Islands, the African coast and Madeira follow.
Summer 1888

1923

A government employee
Gardner accepts a position in the Office of Customs in Malaya, travelling extensively as an inspector of the rubber industry. He becomes responsible for overseeing opium commerce and probably accepts bribes.
September 1923

1927

Meeting a mystic
After travelling to Britain to visit his sick father, Gardner begins evaluating mysticism and experiences contact with dead relatives. One mystic apparently summons a deceased cousin, leaving a lasting impression on Gardner.
28 July 1927

1927

A whirlwind courtship
Gardner marries Dorothea Frances Rosedale, known as Donna. The two have met only days earlier, coincidentally on the same evening that Gardner met the medium who conjured up his late cousin.
16 August 1927

1936

Retirement and return to Britain
Gardner retires from the civil service, intending to remain in Malaya; however, Donna insists that they return to Britain, facilitating further adventures in the occult and Gardner's foray into Wicca.
January 1936

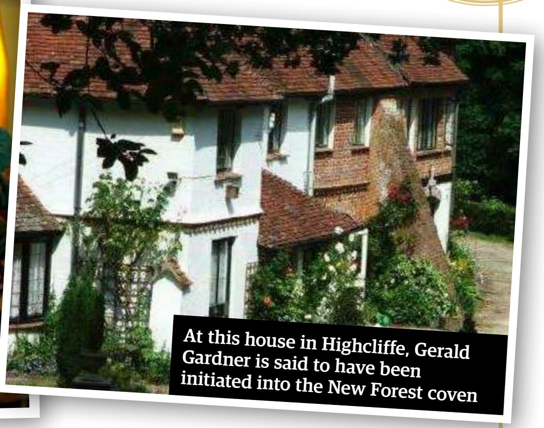
1937

A doctoral degree
Perhaps compensating for his lack of formal education, Gardner purchases a doctoral degree of dubious academic value. He begins using the title 'Dr.' and makes further unsubstantiated academic claims in 1951.
September 1937

Gardner's genesis of Wicca

This elaborately adorned and bound witch's personal *Book of Shadows* resides in an individual's collection

This Wiccan altar includes such items as a cauldron emblazoned with a pentagram along with a ceremonial chalice



At this house in Highcliffe, Gerald Gardner is said to have been initiated into the New Forest coven

Through the blend of ancient, contemporary and personal writings, tenets and perspectives, Gardner developed the modern Wicca religion and became known as its father. After the British government repealed its long-standing Witchcraft Laws in 1951, Gardner published *Witchcraft Today*, another popular text, three years later and *The Meaning of Witchcraft* in 1959.

Along with his close circle of friends, particularly Valiente, he led the transformation of modern witchcraft into the Wicca movement. Capitalising on the turbulent times, the principles of Wicca - including a break from traditional religion, growing interest in occultism and spirituality, and an emphasis on unconventional lifestyles and harmony with nature - grew in popularity in Britain, the United States, Continental Europe and Australia.

Gardner promoted Wicca at every opportunity, even inviting the media to write articles on the topic in the belief that publicity was the only way for the faith to grow. While some of the resulting public scrutiny was unfavourable, interest continued to expand. One of the most difficult aspects of Wicca emanates from its mystic, secretive nature. Throughout Western history, 'witches' have been associated with Satanism, and Wiccans to this day struggle to differentiate their religion from Devil worship.

During his last years, Gardner continued to guide the Bricket Wood coven. He brought several high priestesses into the Wicca fold, including Valiente, Lois Bourne, Patricia Crowther and Eleanor Bone. He became a principal in the Museum of Magic and Witchcraft on the Isle of Man and associated with others who helped popularise Wicca, including author Robert Graves, whose book *The White Goddess* became a prominent vehicle for the rising popularity of the religion.

Gardner died in 1964 at the age of 79. As so often in his life, he was travelling at the time. Intending to visit Lebanon, he collapsed with a massive heart attack at the breakfast table one morning aboard ship. He was buried in Tunisia with little fanfare - but not before he had become the catalyst for a religious movement that counted more than 50,000 members in Western Europe and the United States by the early 1980s.

Defining moment

Inspired by the theatre

August 1939

While residing in Highcliffe, Hampshire, the Gardners attend a play staged by the First Rosicrucian Theatre in England, associated with the Rosicrucian Order Crotona Fellowship. Although Donna dislikes the production, Gerald is inquisitive and begins attending local meetings of the mystic group. He soon becomes critical of many of its beliefs, particularly the claims made by its founder, Alexander Sullivan, that he is the reincarnation of several famous individuals. When a group leader declares that Britain will not become involved in World War II and the country declares war on Nazi Germany the following day, Gardner discounts the organisation's veracity.

Gerald
Brosseau
Gardner
1884-1964
Father of Modern
Witchcraft
Lived Here
1938-1945
The Centre for Pagan

Defining moment

Questions and comments

Summer 1953

Doreen Valiente reviews the *Book of Shadows* and questions Gardner's source material, particularly noting that some passages are similar to the writings of well-known occultist Aleister Crowley, while others may have been taken from the *Key of Solomon* - a text thought to have originated during the Renaissance - and other works rather than ancient sources as Gardner had represented. He reportedly admits that he has appropriated these materials to supplement his own writings and other available information included in the book. Valiente undertakes a substantial revision of the text, destined to become popular during the surge of interest in modern Wicca.

1939

Initiation into New Forest coven
Gardner is friendly with several Rosicrucian members, particularly Edith Woodford-Grimes, or 'Dafo'. They take him to a house owned by Dorothy Clutterbuck, 'Old Dorothy', where he is initiated into the New Forest coven.
September 1939

1947

The Bricket Wood coven
Buying land at Bricket Wood near Hertfordshire, Gardner also purchases an old 'witch's cottage', and reassembles it there. During Midsummer, he hosts a ceremony and becomes founder of the Bricket Wood coven.
21 June 1947

1951

Repeal of the Witchcraft Act
The British government repeals the Witchcraft Act of 1735, prompting Gardner to begin publishing his writings. The *Book of Shadows* becomes a prominent text during the growth of modern Wicca.
22 June 1951

1953

Initiation of Doreen Valiente
After corresponding with Gardner since the prior year, Doreen Valiente requests initiation into the Bricket Wood coven during Midsummer observances. Although he hesitates at first, Gardner agrees. Doreen soon becomes high priestess.
21 June 1953

1964

Death of Gardner
While travelling to Lebanon, Gardner dies aboard ship and is buried in Tunisia. His grave is relocated and a plaque attached that reads, 'Father of Modern Wicca. Beloved of the Great Goddess.'
12 February 1964

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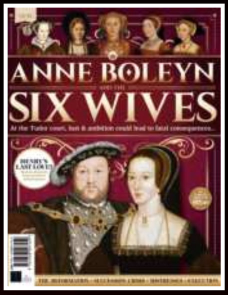
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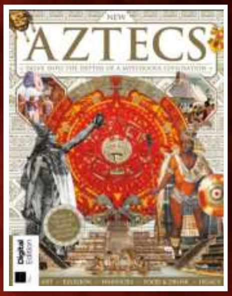

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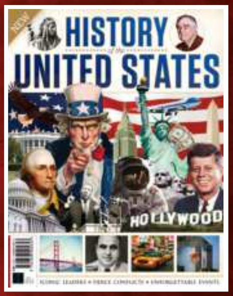
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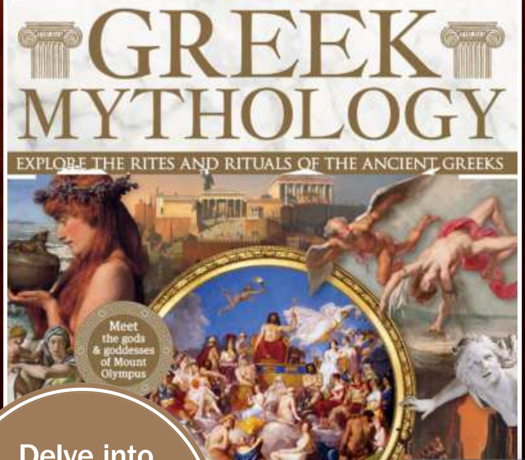
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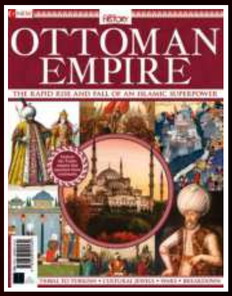
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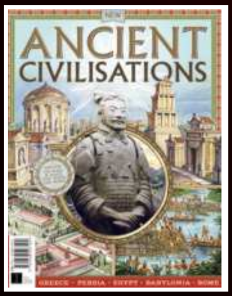
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Renaissance magic

Renaissance magic

The passion for knowledge and how to use it led thinkers deep into a mysterious world where the boundaries between nature, supernature and religion were far from clear

Written by Derek Wilson

In the 15th and 16th centuries the western and near-eastern worlds were home to three major religions - Christianity, Islam and Judaism. All had their intellectual elites with their own convictions about the cosmos and man's place in it. There also existed a multi-faceted paganism, which saw the world as populated with an array of spirit beings, beneficent and malign, who constantly intervened in the lives of humans. All thinking participants in this rainbow-hued speculation had one thing in common: they all agreed that life had meaning. The scholars of these great religions might have continued to work within their own traditions were it not for a series of events in the century 1440-1540 that brought about the most far-reaching intellectual revolution in our history - a revolution that later ages came to call the 'Renaissance'.

There were three powerful factors that brought about this transformation. The first (c.1440) was the invention of a printing press that used moveable type. Before this, books had been expensive, hand-written products that could only be read in libraries or in the homes of wealthy collectors. Now that printing was a fast-growing industry, scholars and students could buy their own copies of mass-produced works and exchange their own ideas with each other much more easily.

The second event added significantly to the number of books available. In 1453 the great city of Constantinople, capital of the Eastern Christian Empire, was captured by Muslim Turks. Among the citizens who fled from this invasion were leading intellectuals who took with them several of their precious ancient texts. The boundaries of academic debate now widened to embrace both newly available religious/philosophical thinking and re-interpretation of traditional beliefs.

In 1489 Marsilio Ficino was accused of magic before Pope Innocent VIII

The third event was an even more radical understanding of Christian truth. Around 1520, thinkers and preachers in various parts of Europe began to challenge various aspects of orthodox Church teaching. This came to be known as the Reformation. The combination of these influences - and not forgetting the pagan superstition, which was felt by people at all levels of society - produced a large array of ideas and beliefs that led to vigorous debate, persecution and, eventually, to war.

The first 'factory' creating this new thinking was North Italy. Scholars working in universities such as Florence and Bologna or in the households of wealthy patrons - merchant princes, rulers of city states or senior ecclesiastics - were much involved in studying the works of classical antiquity - the great philosophers, poets and historians of Greece and Rome who were the founders of their own culture. When the refugees from Constantinople arrived they brought, as well as their own religious, poetic and historical writings, writings of classical authors, which had been long lost in the West but preserved in the East, some of them translated into Arabic. Scholarly Jews also found themselves forced to flee their homes in these years, some from the conquering Muslims in the East and some from Spain, where a purge by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella led to the expulsion or forced conversion of Jews in 1492. As a result, students of the Hebrew Wisdom literature, and especially of that esoteric branch known as Kabbalah, were drawn to the Italian centres of intellectual activity and found themselves debating with their Christian and Muslim counterparts.

To advanced Renaissance thinkers it now seemed obvious that the three great religions must all owe their origins to a more fundamental source of truth and wisdom. This 'prisca theologia' was ardently sought by Renaissance scholars. It was - or so they thought - the gateway to what the ancient Greeks called 'gnosis' (knowledge) - and also to what they labelled 'exousia' (authority/power). The two were inseparably linked, for the person who understood the nature and workings of the temporal and spiritual realms could use that knowledge in a variety of ways. Such men were magi or magicians.

Everyone in medieval society believed in magic, the ability to manipulate the forces latent in nature. The ranks of those initiated into the occult (supernatural or mystical knowledge) included the local wise woman, the herbalist, the apothecary, the alchemist, the astrologer and the necromancer. Church leaders were ardent in warning against malign magic but none doubted the reality of harnessing the forces of nature and supernature. Many clergy, for example, cast horoscopes. There was no clear distinction between theological and philosophical understanding of the workings of the universe. If God had endowed certain herbs with medicinal properties to relieve human suffering, could he not also have arranged the motions of heavenly bodies to assist in the wellbeing of mankind? The distinction between village folklore and philosophical speculation might appear to be absolute but in reality any difference boils down to degrees of intellectual sophistication.

Let us, for the moment, restrict our debate to the profound Renaissance thinkers who were striving to frame an orderly understanding of the workings of the universe. The lead in these deliberations was taken by a group in Florence founded by Marsilio Ficino. It was known as the Platonic Academy because it took its inspiration from the followers of the 6th-century BCE Athenian philosopher, Plato. The Academicians were, however, Neoplatonists because they belonged to a long tradition of philosophers who sought to relate the teaching of the Greek master to later intellectual/spiritual developments, particularly the advent of Christianity. For Ficino and his friends an unbroken chain of gnosis stretched right back, via Plato, to the prisca theologia.

Neoplatonism rejected a clear-cut distinction between matter and spirit. Everything in the universe was suffused by spiritual entities, all of which interacted to control terrestrial life, the movements of the spheres and the activities of the Creator and his angelic cohorts in heaven.

An alchemist works at his craft in this 17th century painting by Adriaen van Ostade

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Magic & discoveries

Explore how attitudes to magic, superstition and science have changed throughout history

Origins of Louisiana Voodoo

Origins of Louisiana Voodoo

Voodooists believe there are two worlds: the visible and the invisible, or the natural and the supernatural

Origins of Louisiana Voodoo

Louisiana voodoo is an offshoot from Haitian vodou, the older west African vodun, and is distinguished by its own set of specific innovations and rituals

Written by Martyn Conterio

New Orleans is an American city unlike any other. Famous for its cuisine, music and festivals, in the late-20th century it came to be known widely as 'the Big Easy', reflecting the locals' penchant for a good time and unruffled nature. But New Orleans' past as a centre for the slave trade and its lurid associations with voodoo - many think it an evil cult - means the Crescent City (another nickname bestowed upon the place) boasts a darkness few other cities in the nation can match. Chicago and New York had their gangsters, Los Angeles its movie stars, but New Orleans boasted a secret world primed by supernatural energy, a land of voodoo kings and queens, people to be respected and sometimes feared. A tormenting hex can be worse than a belly full of lead.

Almost everything we know about voodoo usually comes from films, and Hollywood has been very selective about which aspects of the religion to focus on, misrepresenting rites and rituals as something heathen and blasphemous, sometimes involving human sacrifice, satanic black magic and - in the Haitian version - zombies, those brought back from the grave and forced to work on the plantations and do their master's bidding, their souls trapped, their bodies controlled by a wicked bokor. Voodoo as represented in the movies is tantamount to devil-worshipping. The secretive bayou setting, the rhythmic pounding of drums, the crackle of torchlight, shadowed bodies swaying in blasphemous displays of demonic possession, led fevered imaginations to interpret these things as sacrilegious rites. In Christian minds, Voodoo is satanic and closely associated with witchcraft, necromancy and other black arts. HP Lovecraft wrote in *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928), that the sinister cult at the centre of his tale was "more diabolic than even the blackest of the African voodoo circles." Very often, Voodoo's political and spiritual roots are ignored in favour of racist prejudice and plain ignorance.

As with Haitian Vodou, Louisiana Voodoo's roots lie in the grotesque slave trade and the African diaspora. Forcibly exiled from their homelands and treated as subhuman, they were

An altar highlighting the African and European religious influences on Louisiana Voodoo

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Origins of voodoo

Discover how voodoo came to America and what it takes to become a voodoo queen

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